Wheaton Women in the Long 1950s

By

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Abstract

This is a study of women who attended Wheaton College during the 1940s through the early 1960s. It tries to understand how real college women interacted with political and cultural influences that existed in America during this time. My findings draw connections between student and administrative opinion on Wheaton as an institution during this time period using primary sources from the Wheaton College Archives including the *Wheaton News* and the Wheaton College Bulletin. In order to learn about women’s life choices, I constructed a “survey” that I call the Wheaton College Alumnae Survey. It is an in depth look at women’s lives and life choices from the classes of 1944, 1949, 1954, 1959, and 1964 based on information collected in reunion newsletters. I argue that what is commonly referred to as the “1950s” is actually a much longer period. I call this era the “long 1950s”, which lasts from about 1945 until 1965 and is both an anomalous and dynamic time, especially in considering young women’s role in society. I argue that Wheaton, both its students and administration, supported a wide range of life experiences for its graduates that led Wheaton students of the era to have far more varied lives than what the dominant view of historians of that era have claimed.
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Introduction

Freda Rosenbaum Stoloff would have graduated in June of 1959 had she made it through her final two years at Wheaton College. Instead, as her classmates were walking across the stage to receive their diplomas, she was at home in Newton, Massachusetts, one of the suburbs of Boston where she had made her home after marrying in 1957. Maybe she was waiting for her husband, Sherman, to get home from work, or maybe she was planning for the arrival of her first-born son, Gary, who would be born in 1960. Five years later when interviewed for the class reunion letter in 1964, she reported that she was still married to Sherman, still living in Newton, but now had two children. Gary was now four years old, Danny was three, and she had one on the way. She made no mention of employment or of her attendance in an institution of higher education throughout all the years since she had been at Wheaton. She wrote news about her husband and children, with no mention of her own actions separate from them. When we fast-forward to 2009, on the fiftieth reunion year for the Class of 1959, Freda had a completely different response to her life. She reported that she is living in Brooklyn, New York and she divorced and remarried. She remarked that she received her bachelor’s degree in painting from Boston University, even though it took twelve long years to complete. When she spoke about what caused such a drastic change from the young woman of the late 1950s and early 1960s she credits the Women’s Movement. Looking back over her life she Speaking of her own life she said: “Motherhood, suburban life, the Women’s Movement, and Betty Friedan changed my attitudes to such a degree that I hardly
recognize myself as the Wheaton girl of the ‘50s.”¹ What contributed to these change? Obviously there were both cultural and political influences that allowed for women like Freda to become these typical Wheaton girls and to live their young lives within these parameters of what was acceptable of women. Similarly, there were different political and cultural factors that set the stage for women like Freda to turn away from their past selves and to seek out a different lifestyle.

But who was the typical “Wheaton girl of the ‘50s” and how did she come to be? The typical Wheaton girl from the 1950s was not created in a vacuum. Instead, she was a product of the factors that affected her older sisters throughout the 1940s. She was also someone whose life choices would affect the lives of her younger sisters during the 1960s. In the 1940s, women were involved with the war, which caused a flurry of activity on campus and engaged students with the world around them. In the charged political climate of the 1960s, women were successfully combining familial responsibilities with career aspirations for the most part. The 1950s were an anomalous period for Wheaton women because of cultural and political influences in America.

Jeanne Heathcote, a member of the graduating Class of 1954, who reflected on Wheaton during the 1950s, described the anomalous character of the 1950s. When she wrote for the Class Reunion book also from the year 2009 she remarked on Wheaton during the 1950s she said: “We lived in a special time and place that is long gone and probably misunderstood in today’s world. Although the boundaries of good taste were always present, the implication that we were not to stretch our minds and imagination is

¹ Class Letter, Class of 1959, General Files: Class of 1959, Marion B. Gebbie ’01 Archives and Special Collections, Wallace Library, Wheaton College, Norton, MA. (Hereafter, Gebbie Archives) (Hereafter, General Files)
far-fetched. Despite limitations imposed on us in the 1950s many of us have achieved success in various fields." Heathcote cautions against a monolithic notion of the 1950s as a moment when gender norms denigrated women’s intellect completely or when college women conformed thoroughly to such norms. She is also correct in her assumption that not all women fell to the traditional gender roles prescribed to them. In each of the decades covered in this study from the 1940s to the 1960s women were under pressures that pushed them into domestic traditional roles just as often as they were urged to alternate paths like careers and advanced degrees. At Wheaton, if this balance between family and career were represented in a scale, the side to which most of the weight would have been distributed would have depended on the decade. This is explained by the fact that the 1950s was a dynamic time period that responded to many different cultural and political factors, thereby affecting opportunities available to young women in America.

As World War II ended, the United States dove into another non-aggressive but tense conflict with the Soviet Union and American people feared for their security, which was called the Cold War. Ideas of containment depended on women as protectors of the domestic sphere.

Unfortunately, the way we commonly think of each of the decades of the twentieth century is not applicable when considering the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s. There are common characteristics that most people can call up when questioned about each particular decade. These are things like historical events, common cultural practices, and sentiments that we know were experienced during each specific time period. The characteristics of each decade included in this study do not automatically begin and end

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2 Class Letter, Class of 1954, General Files, Gebbie Archives.
within the same, clean ten-year period, but instead may last longer or shorter. In this way, in trying to determine the characteristics of the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s, it is more important to think of each period more abstractly by understanding that these political and cultural factors that affected the women of the twentieth century would be part of the immediate American consciousness memory from this time. Particularly, the decade of the 1950s is difficult to pinpoint in terms of years. Here I argue that what we commonly refer to as “the 1950s” in terms of women’s place in the decade actually lasts in some ways from the end of World War II until the beginning of the women’s liberation movement. In this study, it is more important to broaden the definition of each decade in order to understand the divisions of time as World War II, containment, and beyond containment rather than the 1940s, 1950s, and 1960s.

It is important to understand how these policies and cultural factors actually affected women at the time period in which they were instituted. Wheaton College offers a useful location for studying how shifting ideas about women, gender and their appropriate goals because of its role as a all women’s New England liberal arts college during this time period. Attitudes towards their female students and graduates by both administrators and current students show young women’s role in the greater American society were regarded. Wheaton College was an all women’s liberal arts college located in New England with a rich history as a pioneer in women’s education. Wheaton during the 1940s to the 1960s changed in order to respond to the changes that affected most institutions of higher education during this time. During the early 1940s, Wheaton was making itself useful in the war effort by creating defense and war relief committees, a Student War Activities Board, wartime scholarships, and victory gardens. Wheaton
morale was tested daily with thoughts of brothers, fathers, and boyfriends suffering overseas when the United States became involved in 1941. Throughout the 1940s, the enrollment of the college stayed between 450 and 500 students, until 1949 when the college reorganized and expanded considerably. Also up until 1949, graduation requirements remained simple, with six hours each in English; a foreign language; and botany, chemistry, physics, or zoology with astronomy being added during the 1945/1946 school year. In 1943/1944 the college majors included American Civilization, Art, Biology, Botany, Chemistry, Classics, Economics, English, French, German, Greek, History and Political Science, Latin, mathematics, Modern Languages, Music, Philosophy and Religion, Physical Science, Physics, Psychology, Romance Languages, Sociology and Zoology. One year later, which marked the end of the war, Spanish was added. 

During the school year 1949/1950 changes to the curriculum and size of Wheaton were taken under consideration. A major expansion act was decided on that originally increased the student body to 500 during this year. Requirements for graduation changed from general courses incorporated from the liberal arts to more specified courses including a variety of courses in the humanities, logic, and the social sciences. More scientific or mathematical majors were added including Astronomy and Mathematics-Physics and more languages including Russian, Italian, and Portuguese. This overall expansion in curriculum set the stage for the major educational changes of the 1950s. This process of expansion and curriculum revision would continue throughout the 1950s and by 1959, enrollment had increased to 750 students. The requirements stayed steady

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until the late 1950s, particularly in the school year 1957/1958. English Composition, a foreign language, history, humanities, and a social science class remained part of the curriculum. Additionally graduation requirements included both health instruction and physical education classes. In terms of the majors, the Astronomy and Mathematics-Physics majors were taken away, but a general “Science” major was added. Additionally, the Placement Office was established as its own separate entity in 1952 through its separation from the Alumnae Office, and Vocational Conferences occurred with frequency throughout this decade. Overall, the 1950s was a period of advancement and progress at Wheaton.4

The early 1960s also brought about significant change. By 1963/1964 Wheaton had increased in size up to 1,000 students and the end to the college expansion was in sight. The early 1960s presented different curriculum requirements that were grouped more specifically to the different areas of education. The health instruction and physical education classes were eliminated except for the first two years. From the 1940s throughout the 1950s, the hours required within the major for graduation stayed consistent at 24 but this changed in 1960/1961, when 30 hours were required for graduation. Additionally, general examinations were required for the Wheaton community within their major throughout the early 1960s. Most of the majors remained the same as the late 1950s, besides the removal of the Science major in 1961/1962. Wheaton’s changes reflect broader cultural and political changes during this time,

especially the effects of World War II, a general push for higher education afterwards, and the professionalization of young women’s lives during the 1960s.$^5$

**Historiography:**

This work builds on the scholarship concerning young women’s role in the long 1950s politics and culture. In looking at Wheaton women specifically, I was able to gather much more information through the help of several primary sources and depended on them to guide my understanding of young women’s role during this time. Therefore secondary literature was important, but could not draw all conclusions. Paul Helmreich’s book *Wheaton College, 1834-1957* outlined the history of the college and enabled me to build off of some of the specific ideas that he discusses. This was extremely important in piecing together my primary sources and placing them within the historical context of Wheaton and then connecting the context of Wheaton to broader cultural and political changes in America. For historical context throughout this period in the United States, the sixth edition of *The American Century* by Walter LaFeber, Richard Polenberg, and Nancy Woloch was incorporated often in order to compare my findings at Wheaton with general sentiments in America. In understanding higher education for women, Linda Eisenmann’s book *Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965* provided me with information about women’s education that placed what I found at Wheaton within the context of postwar America.

I tried to connect events at Wheaton with events affecting women within the wider scope of America, therefore it was extremely important to me to have historiography that connects to each decade. For the 1940s, Susan Hartmann’s book *The

*Home Front and Beyond* discussed women’s role both within the scope of World War II and afterwards. For the 1950s, Elaine Tyler May’s iconic book *Homeward Bound* clearly outlined these political and cultural pressures that influenced women into the home during the 1950s through the policies of domestic containment. May’s book is a standard in understanding Cold War women and the outside factors that affected their lives.

Moving into the 1960s, I chose *A Strange Stirring* by Stephanie Coontz. In her book, Coontz analyzed Betty Friedan’s influence on Cold War women emerging during the early 1960s, while also reminding her readers that the 1960s contained many of the same elements as the 1950s. Overall, each of these books provided me with the ability to place Wheaton in the historical context of the Cold War period by taking each decade as a separate historical moment in order to prove that the policies of the Cold War affected young women in a manner that was much more dynamic than is often claimed. Although historiography was very important to placing Wheaton in historical context, my focus on one institution within a specific time period makes this work unique. Additionally, as the sources in the Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections remain relatively unknown, this thesis adds a new dimension to the history of women’s education in the post-war United States.

**Sources and Methodology:**

My work looks at Wheaton College specifically for many reasons. First of all, I was drawn to the image as the “typical” women’s liberal arts college located in New England. When one thinks of the quintessential college experience for Cold War women, it is significant to compare these ideas to Wheaton. Wheaton women changed with the times from the 1940s to the 1960s, and the Wheaton campus was not immune to
happenings in the outside world. I was able to connect what I found to be the case at Wheaton to the greater happenings to women during the Cold War in general. Second of all, it is familiar to me because I have worked in the Wheaton College Archives and Special Collections for the entire four years I have attended the college. Scouring the archives for information about this time period was both easy and accessible and it is here that the basis of my research originates. The fact that Wheaton College was an all-women’s school until the 1980s is reflected in the sources housed in the archives, where the majority of the material can be connected to women’s history. In this way, there was almost too much information to process in order to truly understand the culture at Wheaton during the specified time period and it became necessary to pick and choose what would be most necessary to prove how dynamic the Cold War was for Wheaton women.

A part of my thesis is focused on five classes that graduated from Wheaton during the period stretching from the 1940s to the early 1960s. I chose to study a sample of classes, each five years apart, including the classes of 1944, 1949, 1954, 1959, and 1964. The survey that I created is called the Wheaton College Alumnae Survey (WCAS) and tries to determine the lives of real life Wheaton women, graduates and non-graduates to understand the long 1950s. It was significant to use the lives of real Wheaton graduates in order to determine to what degree Cold War policies in the wider scope of America affected real life women. My sample of these five classes over a twenty-year period reflects the changing effects of these cultural and political factors. In order to make determinations about this sample of classes and to figure out the way that the women of each class spent their lives, I used the Class Notes in the general files of the archives.
Oftentimes, when there was a reunion year approaching the class would organize to have each of the members of the classes send a short blurb about their lives since either graduation or the previous reunion book. Occasionally the class leaders would organize a survey and would ask pointed questions designed for specific answers, but more often women could write in at their leisure in order to share their news with their classmates and friends. I tried to trace as many women as possible throughout their lives using the consecutive class notes in order to understand the trajectory of their lives, using questions that I had already had in mind in which to analyze them. In this sense, I had as much of a “biography” of as many women as I could trace from each of the classes and used this to determine change over time. This information was placed in a survey that I would fill out for each of the women in order to create a succinct spreadsheet, which answered all my major questions.

I tried to incorporate many different facets of Wheaton women’s lives as possible in order to understand what cultural and political factors were at play that caused them to make that decision and that could be applied to the classes throughout the early Cold War period. I began with the question of graduation. How many students per year graduated from Wheaton compared to the amount that entered as freshmen? At this time, attrition rates were high for young women in institutions of higher education because many women were the ones to sacrifice their education upon marriage. Marital status was also a concern for me because I was trying to understand the percentage of women that were married. Taking this one step further, I wanted to try to understand the age at which most women married because it is important to understand the percentage of women becoming engaged or married before graduation in order to understand the pressures that they were
under to do so. A similar motive existed in my decision to include how many children each woman had and the amount of years after graduation her first child was born. I used this to understand familial pressures of women throughout this period in order to determine change over time. In moving to the more professional side of life, I also looked at the willingness of women to engage with careers or to seek out advanced degrees. Of careers, I wanted to understand which jobs a woman had and when she most commonly worked. These options for the time period of work were before marriage, after marriage but before becoming a mother, throughout her whole life, or after her children had grown. I used these answers to find out how important having a career was to a Cold War woman throughout the time period. In terms of advanced degrees, I wanted to understand if women sought out Masters or PhDs, went to secretarial school, or took additional educational courses. It was also important to understand the majors that Wheaton graduates chose for their academic career. I looked at both the most popular majors as well as the number of scientific majors to understand how women generally felt about higher education during each of my specified class years.

Relying on information that Wheaton College graduates provided about themselves probably led to some skewing of the data. In certain ways, there is the tendency to lie or exaggerate when reporting to one’s class after graduation, as well as only reporting on the good. It is more likely that a person reporting to their college reunion newsletter would choose what to place in their section based on what they thought would make them look more impressive. Although some women may have been exaggerating or lying, the goal of the information is to show what was most important to women from the various years. Their exaggerations only more clearly showed what they
found to be most important for women of their age, social standing, and education to be involved with. And what my subject found most significant changed over the twenty years between 1944 and 1964. Additionally, while researching these women’s lives, I found that the small class size at Wheaton and the close-knit community that had always existed contributed to the fact that women often kept in touch with their friends from college over the years. Wheaton women could have been less likely to exaggerate or make up information that was untrue because they valued the friendships of the women who would be reading the reports.

The college newspaper, *The Wheaton News*, supplemented my research on the alumnae and their changing lives. Through the *Wheaton News* I was better able to understand the climate of Wheaton and what was important to the students throughout the years that they were students at Wheaton. The *Wheaton News* was such an important source because it operated less like a college newspaper and more as a professional newspaper. The *News* was several pages long, included advertisements, and current events. This made it easier to follow, more information to choose from, and gave me faith that it had many readers and would depend on popular opinion in order to operate successfully. Oftentimes, I used articles I found in the *Wheaton News* and expanded on them through further research in the archives. There were easy divides in the subjects of the information provided by the newspaper, which included articles connecting to World War II, travel, vocational opportunities, higher education for women, evidence of Wheaton as an intellectual community, dating, and marriage. Each of the subjects was followed as far as possible and divided by time period. Different decades included different variations on these subjects and oftentimes the way they were presented was not
uniform over time, thereby confirming the change over time that existed during this era. These subjects shaped the narrative and become my standards for measuring the changing pressures that women experienced throughout the postwar period.

Like the *Wheaton News*, The Wheaton College Bulletin enabled me to determine the values, characteristics, and statistics of Wheaton College during the early postwar period. Whereas the newspaper offered student perspectives, the bulletin gives an administration opinion on the merits of attending Wheaton. Distributed annually, the Bulletin tended to include similar sections each year, while the details of their contents changed. Generally the bulletin would begin with a section on the history and characteristics of Wheaton College. The admission section was indicative of the type of student that Wheaton College was trying to attract based on the changing set of requirements for entrance. Usually the next section included the requisites that would need to be completed before a student could graduate, which also changed often throughout the early Cold War period. As a liberal arts college, the change was often based on the general courses rather than more specifically within the major. Majors were added and removed frequently during this period of time, which were based on both the educational values at Wheaton as well as in the educational atmosphere in America in general. It was also important to note the different sections of the Wheaton College bulletin that were not consistently present during the Cold War period, but still affected the Wheaton community. Its annual publication schedule made the Wheaton Bulletin useful as a concise reflection of institutional priorities and educational goals. All these sources combined to perspective of Wheaton students at the time, Wheaton graduates, and the administration.
Chapter Outline:

This work will try to delve deeper into some of the experiences of a small sample of women who attended Wheaton College during the long 1950s and how changing postwar contexts affected their lives. It will look at this time period in order to understand the culture at Wheaton and how students, the College, and alumnae responded to specific events in both women’s higher education and the culture of America. In this way, it will express the way that changes occurred over time for women during the Cold War period. The first chapter will look at the 1940s and will try to understand the effects of World War II and the immediate postwar period on women’s education. It is here that during the beginning of the decade gender roles were in flux with women occupying less traditional forms of employment and were urged into forms of education that men had previously led. During the postwar period, excitement and activity were minimal in comparison and women were sent to the home. The second chapter deals with the 1950s and the continuation of these sentiments. More effort in the Wheaton community was placed on women finding a husband, although this was less defined as some might believe. Wheaton women were under similar pressures during the 1940s to seek careers or advanced degrees after graduation. The third chapter transitions into the 1960s. It is here that there is a mix between the traditional views of women from the 1950s being brought together with the infiltration of new radical political ideas commonly from the later 1960s. This mix is important in understanding women’s changing role at Wheaton College.

In most cases, a static view of women’s role in the early Cold War keeps historians from looking in depth at this period. Women of all ages were often as
housewives and young college women are most commonly depicted as searching for a husband in order to later fill this role. But this is simply not true. Women throughout the 1940s until the early 1960s were the product of their environments. As cultural and political factors dictated their lives, they were pushed and pulled in a variety of directions: either towards a private role within the family or a more public role immersed in career or further education. Even further, some Cold War women combined these two roles in a way that is not reflected in the usual view of the Cold War. It is important to look at colleges, because women had already signed themselves up for excellence by subscribing to an institution of higher education. It is also a defining moment in a young women’s life and has the power to sway the person that she would soon become. It is important to place these young women’s decisions within the context of the era in which they made their life decisions by examining cultural and political factors that influenced them.
Chapter 1: The 1940s

On the day of graduation in early June of 1945, American victory in Europe had just been won and victory in Japan was on the horizon. The class of 1945 in particular experienced the grand majority of their college years within the context of World War II. Wheaton’s activity in the war effort throughout the long and fearful years that the United
States was at war enabled these college educated women on their graduation day to go off into the world knowing that they would be useful in the post-war reconstruction effort. President Alexander H. Meneely expressed these sentiments in his graduation address. Speaking optimistically about women’s role in society, he stated “Women have emerged to take their place in the competitive world outside the home, and their vote carries much weight.” His speech revealed a certain level of optimism for the peaceful future, which became a sentiment that he connected to the benefits of education during these stressful years, especially for women. Dr. Meneely spoke of the value of education in order to “broaden understanding” of the world and especially of the future “intelligent choice of leaders”, in order to shield America from a future conflict of the same scale as the recently ended war. During World War II, women had been forced to step up into roles that were outside of the home and put them in the forefront of change in America, and although it was short-lived it spurred change in ideas about women’s traditional role. And as the war was ending in Europe and Wheaton College women were graduating in spring 1945, the US government, bosses, and college administrators were still telling women that they should occupy the public sphere.  

**Wheaton in World War II**

Wheaton had an active stance during the war; administrators, professors, and students embraced volunteerism and safety precautions during this tumultuous time. During the war years, the Wheaton community was both active in the war effort and curious in current events. Wheaton women received two messages during World War II. The first promoted volunteerism. Wheaton students, faculty, and administrators

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6 “Dr. Meneely Advises Class at Graduation- College Education Values Stressed”, *Wheaton News*, 2 June 1945, Gebbie Archives.
volunteered extensively through a variety of activities and programs. The second message involved education for the roles women would need to take on once the war was over. Wheaton and other colleges that women attended during the war used their female students as vessels to promote democracy and to prepare the American population for the postwar period of advancement. These two separate messages could be found at Wheaton throughout the war.

Volunteerism

The college administration and students worked together to promote and support volunteer activities through which students contributed to the war effort. Even before the U.S. entered the war in 1941, Wheaton was active in raising money for both American and European charities, sewing necessary articles of clothing for British troops, and organizing First Aid classes that were taught to both students and faculty through the coordination of the Committee on National Defense and War Relief, originally chaired by Professor Ernest J. Knapton at its creation in 1940. Faculty mostly spearheaded volunteer efforts on the Wheaton campus. The Wheaton News reported that faculty members “contributed to the information and morale of several groups by talking at Wheaton, in Norton, and in surrounding towns.” In other cases, faculty members were involved in the war effort either through their service or war-related research, which caused them to leave their posts at Wheaton and pursue their efforts elsewhere. At the beginning of the 1942-1943 academic year, the war relief effort was reorganized and officially split into committees that included War Education and Publicity, Finance, Training and Public

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7 “War relief activities on campus termed successful by Mr. Hidy”, Wheaton News, 14 June 1941, Gebbie Archives.

The Student War Activities Board (SWAB) was created in 1943 by the faculty handing over war activities to the students. This student organization ran most of the volunteer activities on campus including blood drives, book drives, and war bond drives. When it was created, it was composed of a general chairman and eight committee heads. The committees included Air Raid Protection, War Relief, Sewing, Conservation, War Courses, Publicity, War Stamps and Bonds, and Farm Labor. Each of these committees organized the different aspects of the war relief efforts on campus that were originally taken care of by the Committee on National Defense and War Relief. Also, the administration asked each Wheaton student to volunteer four hours of service each month to the many war-related activities that took place daily, or to help out with maintenance of the college because of the shortage of staff at the college. In this case, SWAB recruited students to complete housekeeping duties on campus either in the dining halls or in the dormitories. Additionally, food rationing and farming allowed Wheaton to continue to feed its community and operate normally in this respect.

Camp Miles Standish, which was established in the nearby city of Taunton in 1942, offered another site for volunteerism during the war. Soldiers heading out to war spent their remaining night in America housed at this army base, and Italian prisoners of war brought back to the United States also made brief stays there.  

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students interacted with Camp Miles Standish by volunteering their time or attending social functions. Because of the close location of this base, Norton was designated as a war zone, and the college administration made sure that the campus practiced safety precautions in the event of an attack. All these separate events compounded at Wheaton to invoke a constant excitement and effort concentrated on World War II. It seemed to be on everyone’s minds all the time.

Postwar Planning

During the war colleges and universities promoted women’s advancement by envisioning their helping to rebuild America after the trauma was over. As Wheaton College was an all women’s college the focus of education had always been on women, but now women were given more responsibilities to use their education in the public sphere. Historian Babette Faehmel states, “Female students repeatedly heard the message that for democracy to survive, they needed to commit themselves to active political work and use their expertise for the building of the postwar order.”13 This faith in women’s role in the postwar world urged women to use their educations for a specified career in postwar planning, and Wheaton women took on a more public role to fit this demand.

War courses prepared women for summer and post-graduate jobs. Subjects of the courses were varied, but included “the use of commercial art forms in preparing propaganda and advertising materials, mechanical drawing, practical bacteriology, and industrial analytical methods.” Additionally, Wheaton students were chosen in secrecy for a course in cryptography instituted by the United States Navy during the school year of 1942-1943. Wheaton students underwent security clearance by federal agents in order

to learn techniques to break secret codes used by Germans. There is limited information about this course because of its secret nature, but it appears that several Wheaton students used their skills obtained in this course for work in the U.S. Navy.\footnote{Helmreich, Wheaton College, 1834-1957, 366-367.}

In addition to courses addressed to women’s participation in the war itself, planning for the anticipated postwar period became a topic of discussion on campus. One example of postwar planning comes from a new column called “New Horizons” that first appeared in the Wheaton News on November 25\textsuperscript{th}, 1944 and ran until March 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1946. Column authors Mary Brent Hagner and Margaret Mason kept up a running commentary on post-war planning and options for their fellow students after graduation.\footnote{“New Horizons”, Wheaton News, 25 November 1944. Gebbie Archives.} The variety of topics covered over the course of the almost two year period that the column ran included: opinions by the two students on what would happen at the end of the war, whether another war might occur on American soil, how labor would operate in the postwar period, the actions of President Truman, and even the value of a liberal arts education in a postwar world. There are two implications in the presence of “New Horizons” in the Wheaton News at this time. First, it showed that Wheaton students often planned for the future after the war. These women felt that they had the authority to remark on the future political and economic policies that would be absence in later Wheaton News editions after the war ended. Secondly, the presence of “New Horizons” showed that Wheaton inspired its students and recent graduates to seek involvement with the postwar period when it arrived, which usually comprised using skills they obtained at Wheaton during the war.
At Wheaton, postwar planning also took the form of the Wartime Scholarship Programs that were offered to place students on tracks to solve some of the issues that America would face once the war had ended. Wheaton offered ten $400 scholarships during the school years 1943/1944 and 1944/1945 for freshman that would spend their first two years within the wartime study framework, and then would move to their final two years within the regular major curriculum.\textsuperscript{16} During the 1943/1944 academic year, Wheaton freshmen students who signed up to take part in the Wartime Scholarship Program would be split into two groups consisting of fifteen freshmen with a definite course of study and career in mind. Each group would study an aspect of the American plan for reconstruction after the war. The first section would focus on scientific service to meet demands of scientific innovation necessary in America. This group would take courses in English Composition, a modern foreign language, two courses in Mathematics, Physics, Chemistry, or Biology, and History. The second group would concentrate on governmental service, business, or economic reconstruction through courses in English Composition, modern foreign language, Economics, History, and either Mathematics or a Laboratory Science.\textsuperscript{17}

The next school year in 1944/1945, the two groups were divided into “Science and its influence on human affairs”, which would focus on scientific innovation and “Problems of Peace”, which would focus on politics and economics of the postwar period. The scientific group was required to take English Composition, History, a modern foreign language, and two courses from Botany, Chemistry, Mathematics, Physics, or Zoology. The second group took courses in Economics, English Composition, History, a

\textsuperscript{16} Helmreich, \textit{Wheaton College, 1834-1957}, 375.
\textsuperscript{17} \textit{Wheaton College Bulletin}, 1943/1944, Gebbie Archives.
modern foreign language, and either Mathematics or a Laboratory Science. Each group met regularly with faculty for informal discussions on “scientific work, postwar economic problems, international relations, and reconstruction.” Also, two scholarships were awarded at $800 and four were given out at $400. These programs promoted work for women after graduation because their main goal was to prepare the students for postwar jobs in governmental or economic and scientific fields.\textsuperscript{18} The end of the war brought an end to these wartime study programs and scholarships, but while they were implemented they demonstrated the willingness of the Wheaton community to engage with the war in a way that they would not engage with anything else both academically and intellectually once the war had ended. These wartime programs were a response to increased volunteerism by Wheaton students in an active way during World War II. These women were approaching the war with fearlessness by engaging with programs that would place them in the forefront of the reconstruction period.\textsuperscript{19}

\textbf{Class of 1944}

Statistics about the Class of 1944 can be an indicator of the way that this engagement during World War II enabled women a more public role in their lives after graduation. Using my Wheaton College Alumnae Sample (WCAS) for the class of 1944, I have found a lot of information about their marriage, further education, and employment patterns that can be interpreted in the context of their active participation in the war effort while they were at Wheaton. In terms of the number of freshmen that entered Wheaton and the number of seniors who graduated, the class of 1944 had a 59% graduation rate. This low percentage may have shown the heightened activity of Wheaton

\textsuperscript{18} Helmreich, \textit{Wheaton College, 1834-1957}, 375.
\textsuperscript{19} \textit{Wheaton College Bulletin}, 1944/1945, Gebbie Archives.
Women during World War II. In 1944, 18% of all graduates were involved in some type of scientific major, which was praised at Wheaton and at other women’s school during the war in order to come up with post-war solutions. Eighty-nine percent of the class of 1944 married at some point during their lives. In 1944, 8% of women married while in college before graduation, and 92% of the graduates married in the 0 to 7 years after graduation. The shorter range of years than future classes reflects the marriages between women and soldiers before leaving for war, which is reflected in national trends of a rapid drop in the marriage age coupled with a rise in the birthrate during the war.\(^{20}\) For the class of 1944, the most popular careers were to become a teacher, real estate agent, or a secretary. This class reported a total of only 9 different positions that these women held during their lifetimes. Women in this class worked most often after their children were grown, but not before. In terms of furthering their education, 10% of women in the class of 1944 sought out graduate degrees. These statistics provide information about the way that World War II influenced the lives of women who went to college during this time.

On June 2\(^{nd}\), 1945 the *Wheaton News* included a short article written by an anonymous author with the title, “War Brings Gain”. In reflecting on the war and the way that it changed the Wheaton community, the author wrote: “Most important of all, we discovered that life could be enjoyed with no more than a good imagination and a desire to enjoy it. By learning to enjoy and to understand the commonplace, we have gained something that we shall take with us into the world of peace when comfort or excitement are ours for the taking.”\(^{21}\) The article goes on to say that even though the war years were difficult on the Wheaton campus, Wheaton students emerged stronger from enduring

\(^{21}\) “War brings gain”, *Wheaton News*, 2 June 1945, Gebbie Archives.
them. They were ready to embrace the comfort of a world that was not overshadowed by fear. They were also ready to embrace a postwar United States where they could assume the role that they had prepared for as active members of American society.

**National Context**

The effect of World War II on women’s role in society during the beginning of the 1940s was far-reaching. As the war industry began to pick up, the government sought out female employees as more and more men were being sent abroad. During the three years and seven months that America was involved in the war, 6 million women entered the labor force, most of them in the defense industry.\(^2\) It is at this time that government propaganda created the Rosie the Riveter image in order to urge women to fulfill their patriotic duty by taking on a more public role during times of crisis. This public role allowed women an increase in wages, better work environments, and more visibility in educational pursuits than they were allowed before the war.\(^3\) Often, popular culture and common views on American history profess pride in women’s accomplishments during World War II but do not take into account the rigid standards women had to face in the public sphere, the reasons behind their employment, and the fact that it only lasted several years before they again occupied a more private existence. Changes that took place during the war that pushed women into the public sphere were not significant enough to make much of an impact on the domestic role of women that was becoming increasingly popular. At the same time, women at Wheaton College were continuously

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urged to occupy the public sphere by college officials and peers throughout the long
1950s. When women were involved in the war, as historian Susan Hartmann explains,
“they were reminded that their new positions were temporary, that retaining the
traditional feminine characteristics was essential, and that their familial roles continued to
take precedence over all others.”24 Women did not receive equal wages to men even
though they worked in the same industries men had recently vacated. Women received
wages that were equal to their male counterparts only when they directly replaced men in
jobs that they had left behind.25 While it is true that women continued to flood into the
workforce after the war was over, the government and the greater American society
determined their position in the public sphere as temporary.

Cold War

After the war had ended, the world watched as the victors decided what their next
move would be. In America, Roosevelt’s death in April of 1945 brought in President
Truman. Immediately upon entering the White House, he is recorded as saying to the
Secretary of State, “We must stand up to the Russians at this point and not be easy with
them”.26 Even though the United States and the USSR had come together during the war
years, the communist and capitalist division ran deep in world consciousness throughout
the twentieth century. Stalin himself was a communist dictator that built the Soviet Union
into a great industrial and agricultural power during the twenty years before WWII began.
During the late 1940s, the Iron Curtain began to slowly fall on Eastern Europe, giving the
Soviet Union a buffer against the capitalist countries and allowing it to restructure itself,

24 Hartmann, The Home Front and Beyond, 23.
25 Hartmann, The Home Front and Beyond, 58.
26 LaFeber, et al., The American Century, 41.
although it tolerated absolutely no intervention from other powers. This conflicted with Truman’s new policy, which secured at least 85% of the world within American economic policies to purchase American supplies. With more factories than ever before producing American goods in the post-war boom, Truman wanted all of these products shipped throughout the world to confirm the United States as the dominant world power. Americans demanded access to Eastern Europe but were met with Russian resistance. In order to take on the Soviet Union, Truman needed the support of the American people, and he gained it by instilling a fear that the influence of the Soviets on the war would compromise their hard-earned freedoms. He unleashed the Truman Doctrine within this atmosphere of fear, in which he vowed to save the free world from communism in Greece and Turkey thereby officially starting the Cold War. The idea of containment was born, when President Truman wanted to contain communism from spreading and affecting other nations who would fall easily to its powers.

In 1950, there was a movement away from containment and towards action, which was embodied within the context of the Korean War. Indirect action was required by the United States in order to combat the threat of communism, which would swallow the world if proper actions were not taken, therefore establishing the domino theory. At the same time, Senator Joseph McCarthy shared this fear of communism. Senator McCarthy rose to fame based on his accusations that communists were infiltrating the government, accusing high-powered Democratic officials of having Communist sentiments. Most people feared these accusations and conformed to uniform standards so

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as not to become involved in the Red Scare.\textsuperscript{30} This fear and conformity would come to characterize the remainder of the Cold War, seeping into American consciousness throughout the next decade. During the Cold War, women would have been fully aware of these ideas of fear and conformity and would have lived their lives accordingly. Most Americans were too afraid of the possible outcomes to live their lives away from the standards.

The government’s aspirations for an American controlled conflict without action worked based on the fear of the American public, and the American public dealt with this fear by conforming to strict standards of normality. It is within this context that the spirit of the Cold War period was born. As President Dwight D. Eisenhower entered the scene in 1952, these responses of fear and conformity were already fully in place.\textsuperscript{31} To deal with this fear, some Americans left the cities for the suburbs, engaged with the consumer culture and mass media, and promoted domestic ideals that emphasized the influence of the family as a sense of security. Historian Elaine Tyler May has drawn a parallel to the political foreign policy of containment of communism with something she has called domestic containment, which named the sphere of influence as the home, where Americans could feel safe and secure among family members and enjoy the prosperity of America.\textsuperscript{32} The policy of domestic containment pertained to middle class white communities, a population that included women that would have attended Wheaton; therefore, Wheaton was under the same domestic containment policy on a smaller scale. Women became the embodiment of this turn to domesticity. Even though the world was

\[\text{LaFeber, et al.,} \text{ The American Century, 92-93.}\]
\[\text{LaFeber, et al.,} \text{ The American Century, 96.}\]
\[\text{May, Elaine Tyler.} \text{ Homeward bound: American families in the Cold War Era.} \text{ 20th Anniversary Ed. (New York: Basic Books, 1988), 16.}\]
at odds with communism and democracy, women’s roles would embody a sense of security for husbands and children by making life within the home as comfortable as possible. After long decades that included both an economic depression and then a world war, Americans needed something concrete to give them solace, like the comforts of home. During this time, a common belief was that happiness for young men and women lay in early marriages and lots of children. Within the context of fear and conformity, young women’s choices were influenced by these policies of domestic containment.

Higher Education:

Women’s numbers in institutions of higher education increased throughout the Cold War period. This was the result of increased emphasis for both men and women on higher education during the postwar years. The expansion of the student admission to Wheaton in 1949 paralleled an increase in interest in higher education nationwide. Soldiers returning from the war had the benefit of the Servicemen’s Readjustment Act, or the G.I. Bill, behind them, which provided money for their educational ventures at any institution they chose. At its origin, the G.I. Bill slowed the entrance of the soldiers back into the workforce, but at its end, it assisted millions of people to attend college who would otherwise not have been able to do so. Institutions of higher education grew in size both through enrollment and the physical size of the institutions during this period to make room for the large number of students. Although men who would be influenced by

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the G.I. Bill to seek education would not have been admitted to Wheaton, the overall cultural emphasis on the importance of a college education also inspired women to attend college. Also, the widening of the standards of what was considered middle class in America based on a growing Gross Domestic Product allowed families to send their daughters to college when they would not have been able to before. At the same time, even though there were more women in college than ever before, they still made up a smaller percentage of the student body in relation to men. According to Linda Eisenmann, women’s proportion in colleges in the postwar world dropped. In 1920 women had made up 47.3% of the total population. This figure dropped to 40% in 1940 and further to 31% in 1950. Those who did go to college received an education that was focused almost exclusively on the necessity of finding a partner while in college or shortly thereafter, that would provide the same upward social mobility that a job could also provide. Women who chose majors that led to stereotypically feminine careers did manage to find work, but those who tested the gendered division of labor had a more difficult time. During the postwar period, college was a very different place at Wheaton and most other colleges that educated women based on the increase in enrollment and the change in curriculum.

The general crusade for higher education in America during the postwar period was started within the Truman presidency, especially within the frameworks of the President’s Commission on Higher Education in 1947. The President’s Commission

37 Faehmel, College Women in the Nuclear Age, 51.
38 May, Homeward Bound, 77.
40 May, Homeward Bound, 77.
41 May, Homeward Bound, 78.
studied higher education on a national scale in order to better determine the best way to
deal with the aftermath of World War II. It was the hope of the President’s Commission
that higher education would inspire progress that would elevate the United States
scientifically, academically, and socially. The main goal of the President’s Commission
was to denounce segregation of higher education in terms of race, religion, or gender,
opening up the possibilities for those that were not always given access to this facet of
education. Although short and sparse, the section on women’s higher education promoted
stronger feelings of acceptance of women’s place in colleges and universities during the
postwar period.\footnote{Eisenmann, \textit{Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965,} 51-54.}

**Wheaton College: Late 1940s**

**Higher Education:**

The late 1940s was a particularly innovative time at Wheaton College. President
Meneely vowed to make changes in the curriculum. Historian Paul Helmreich discussed
the curriculum change during this period as a response to the “revolution in postwar
higher education”.\footnote{Helmreich, \textit{Wheaton College 1834-1957,} 453.} Instead of an open choice of electives, liberal arts programs began to
depend on a “specific set of distribution and concentration requirements designed to
prevent too great an overconcentration in a single discipline or field”.\footnote{Helmreich, \textit{Wheaton College, 1834-1957,} 453.} President
Meneely reviewed the curriculum thoroughly from 1945 until 1948 with the help of a
faculty committee. Under the new curriculum standards, the general requirements for
students at Wheaton increased in number of required hours and broadened in their scope.
During the school year 1943/1944, there had been minimal requirements in the broad
base of general courses necessary for liberal arts education. The general courses had included 6 hours each in English, a foreign language, history, and a science class in botany, chemistry, physics, or zoology. These courses stayed constant at Wheaton except for the addition of astronomy in the science choice until 1949/1950, when all later classes would be required to take English composition, a foreign language including French, German, Greek, Italian, Latin, Portuguese Russian or Spanish, a class in the humanities including art, literature, music philosophy or religion, a history class, and either logic, mathematics, natural science, or psychology. Additionally, students would spend twenty-four to forty-eight hours within their specific major in one subject or an interdepartmental major. One of the biggest changes was the addition of the Education program, which would enable Wheaton women to receive teaching certificates within their college years.45

It is important to note that these curriculum changes came from the period immediately after World War II. Education in general was receiving more attention, and it became acceptable for women to seek some of these same types of opportunities as during the war years. Changes at Wheaton College followed educational trends in the U.S. more broadly by strengthening the education that one would receive at while enrolled at college. It is important to note how the Wheaton students responded to these curriculum changes because it would have the most direct influence on them as students. As it turns out, Wheaton women were very involved in these changes. There was coverage practically weekly on the changes in the Wheaton News including student polls and surveys on their experience, a discussion of curriculum reorganization, and

discussion of the benefit of a liberal arts education. On May 1\textsuperscript{st}, 1948, there an article entitled “Wheaton Faculty Approve New College Curriculum” stated, “The crucial task of higher education today, therefore, is to provide a unified general education for American youth. Colleges must find the right relationship between specialized training on the one hand, aiming at a thousand different careers, and the transmission of a common cultural heritage towards a common citizenship on the other.”\textsuperscript{46} The goals of a new curriculum spoke to the general value of a liberal arts education rather than to the gender-specific education of women and students and administrators worked together to ensure that this would happen. Thus, in the five years following the end of WWII, the temporary wartime emphasis on women’s roles outside their homes and families enabled them to feel comfortable speaking out in the name of their education.

**Intellectual Community:**

Even though the absence of men during World War II could have enabled women to fill the gap that some of their absences provided, women remained the minority at colleges throughout the early 1940s.\textsuperscript{47} According to historian Susan Hartmann, in 1944, the peak year of the war, women were not fully fifty percent of the college enrollment.\textsuperscript{48} Similarly to men, women had duties on the home front that took precedence over their ability to receive an education. Although women were enrolling in college in ever-increasing numbers, they were still receiving a smaller number of the total degrees awarded. Those women who were enrolled in college during and after World War II were inspired by the interest of the American public in politics and current events as the war

\textsuperscript{46} “Wheaton Faculty Approve New College Curriculum”, *Wheaton News*, 1 May 1948., Gebbie Archives.

\textsuperscript{47} Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 101.

\textsuperscript{48} Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 103.
raged on. All different types of media reported on the happenings abroad and the decisions made at home, thereby making politics more significant.⁴⁹

Wheaton women were interested and involved in American politics throughout the long 1950s. The *Wheaton News* started including evidence of their interest in the wider world during the 1940s, and this level of interest remained mostly confined to this decade. Students were not only interested in learning about politics, but they were also passionate about acting on these politics, both in America and in the wider world. On November 10th, 1945, the *News* reported that the Wheaton community wrote to President Truman petitioning for eventual work on world federation as well as on international control of atomic energy.⁵⁰ This is characteristic of the immediate postwar period, when the state of the world was of great concern, especially among intellectual communities such as campuses. Similarly, on March 15th, 1947, the Wheaton Student Federalists sent out a campus-wide poll, and the *News* reported that the majority of students were in favor of world government proposed by the group.⁵¹ The most telling example of Wheaton’s intellectual commitment to the wider world comes from October 2nd, 1948, when the *Wheaton News* reported on the Symposium on World Issues. In this case, four authorities discussed America’s foreign and domestic policies.⁵² The symposium’s topic indicated that world issues had come to the forefront of student’s minds. It seems that the fresh

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memory of the World War caused people, especially college campuses, to take these
issues to heart in order to hopefully prevent a similar situation.

Consistently throughout the period starting on September 28th, 1946, there was a
column devoted to political thought originally called “Political Fragments” and later
called “Political Ramblings” in later editions beginning on February 10th, 1950.53 For
most of the early Cold War period, “Political Fragments” was included in every weekly
News edition. The presence of this column brings up two points. Firstly, the constancy of
the section points to the fact that the Wheaton community never lost interest in politics
during this time, and this interest was spread widely so that people shared this desire to
stay intellectually connected to American politics. Also, the inclusion of a regular section
on political talk leads the reader to believe that the Wheaton News operated as a “real”
newspaper, which is one that could be counted on to deliver important news to an
interested and invested community.

During the election of 1948, a special issue of the Wheaton News was distributed
on October 28th, and this issue contained only information on each candidate’s positions,
rather than the usual content of the weekly News.54 Some headlines from this special
addition included: “Control of Upper House May Switch To Democrats Though Election
Is Close”, “What is the Stand of the Three Major Parties Concerning Current Issues?”,
“M.E. Keller ’49 Picks Republican To Carry Election” and “Republican/Democratic
Party Platform”. The Wheaton News was not simplifying the political issues, but were
instead projecting information about the upcoming election as what it was: an important
political decision in America that deserved the attention of all those who could vote. The

53 “Political Ramblings” Wheaton News, 10 February 1950, Gebbie Archives.
way that the *Wheaton News* regarded the election shows that women deserved as much information as men to make political decisions.

**Vocational Opportunities:**

Alumnae reports were a part of the *Wheaton News* and were used to report on the activities of previously graduated classes. The first instance for the period of this study appeared on November 10th, 1945, when the News reports that alumnae were at “University of Buffalo, studying at MIT, graduate work in education, research technician, Office of European Affairs, and one engaged”.55 Some were occupying fields that were common for women such as education, while others were joining careers that expanded their role in the public sphere, and others were marrying directly after graduation in order to align with the cultural trend to early marriage. On October 12, 1946 another report of the recently graduated classes related that two members were doing graduate work, one girl was in nursing school, and that two alumnae were now an occupational and physical therapist.56 Directly after the war, Wheaton women from the class of 1945 also became involved in work that was considered acceptable for women according to general cultural standards. The next time there was an Alumnae Notes section was in 1948. On October 30, 1948 it is reported that Wheaton graduates are travelling in Europe, working at an insurance agency, and as a secretary.57 This is another instance of Wheaton graduates of the class of 1947, which advertised a career in insurance. In this way, for at least one graduate, there was less of a disconnect between what the Wheaton administration was providing as viable options for women during this time, and what women actually did.

On the other hand, as the spirit of the war years began to evaporate, and a more contained idea for women’s work as feminine and conducive to marriage began to descend in its place. As historian Susan Hartmann has pointed out, the traditionally feminine professions during this time were where women thrived and included teaching, nursing, and secretarial work.\(^{58}\) In the case of the class of 1947 and the rest of the later 1940s classes, the disconnect between proposed careers and actual careers taken on grew, thereby indicating the ushering in of a new decade and with it, new cultural and political ideas that involved women’s rightful place.

After 1948, very little is mentioned in the *Wheaton News* of women’s work until the middle of the 1950s. The absence of these types of concerns for jobs and careers is shown through the limited information of this sort in the *Wheaton News* from 1948 until 1955. This shows a pull away from careers and jobs during the difficult times of the war years into the better lifestyles provided after the war that allowed women to seek marriages instead of careers. The Great Depression and World War II were two incredibly difficult times for both women and men, where family life was influx. After this period, there was much more emphasis on the home, so vocational opportunities began to have less significance in the lives of Wheaton students and graduates.

**Family Values:**

As in the wider scope of America, times of peace changed Wheaton attitudes towards the importance of American family values, the wider world, and the memory of war. The family and the home were safe and secure and everything else was not. During this period, family gained importance in the lives of Americans. An example of new

\(^{58}\) Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 114.
stresses on family life can be found in the *Wheaton News* during the years between 1945 and 1946. In November of 1945 students addressed a letter to President Meneely asking for a longer Christmas vacation during the first year without the looming sadness and loneliness that the war brought on. “The letter said, in part that, ‘this Christmas, of all years, a long vacation would be appreciated, indeed. Many of our fathers, brothers, friends and sweethearts will be home for the first time in several years.’” Although they were not granted the opportunity for an extended break, the request shows an increased emphasis on American family values on the Wheaton campus, especially during the holidays, which can be seen as synonymous with family time.

**Dating:**

A popular idea concerning women during this time was meeting a potential husband while in college and getting married soon afterwards. At college campuses, women were still marrying frequently, but the absence of college age men lessened the amount of events that the college usually put together to ensure these matches would happen, compared to the frequency in the 1950s. During the war, Wheaton women were not sitting around waiting for the return of their partners, but instead were incredibly industrious and the war effort occupied their time to the fullest extent. At the end of this time, women stopped having such an active role on campus and instead resumed a more passive stance. Without all the activity that classified the war years, Wheaton women could resume the search for a marriage partner, which became typical on the Wheaton campus through specified events beginning in the late 1940s that brought men and women together.

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59 “Students Ask Longer Vacation- Poll Protests Cut In First Peacetime Xmas Vacation”, *Wheaton News*, 3 November 1945, Gebbie Archives.
One of these special events were the dances in which several men’s colleges would descend upon the Wheaton campus for a giant mixer. Other dances allowed women to invite dates from other colleges for a big event. The first prom, where women invited dates to campus, after the war clearly showed the dichotomy between the war years and the post-war years. On March 9th, 1946 the *Wheaton News* reported on the first prom, which brought many promises of a lighter and brighter future after the war. “The old wartime Wheaton is out and the weekend is in. We all remember with a shudder the days when a weekend meant time for writing a paper or finishing up an experiment. That was the era in which we carried hatpins and had no occasion to sue them. But now the books are tossed into the empty goldfish bowl and dry test tubes rest on their racks while the Wheaton weekender twirls a long skirt to a Harvard samba or meets an ex-ski trooper on the Eastern slopes.”60 This article, although meant to be funny, clearly explains some of the sentiments that were surely experienced by a large portion of the Wheaton campus. The studious, war years had ended and the flirty, postwar years had begun. The division is clear and women would no longer be concentrated schoolwork and activities, but would concentrate their efforts on finding a man that would bring a determined future. Instead of one clear path that would lead to creative thought, an intellectual community, and further education or a career, a second path had been forged that led into a man’s arms, which may have been preferable after the long war.

**Marriage:**

The ideals of a housewife as the next plausible career for women at the wars end began to infiltrate the Wheaton community from many angles. In many cases, as women

60 “Peacetime, Promtime and Springtime Bring Men, Tuxes and Gala Weekends”, *Wheaton News*, 9 March 1946, Gebbie Archives.
swapped their public role for a private one, family and home life became emphasized. This was especially true on college campuses like Wheaton, where these housewives would be bred. An example of the promotion of this idea comes from the *Wheaton News* on June 6th, 1948 for irons, which were presented to the “future brides of Wheaton” and tested by the “‘Diamond Ring club’ of engaged Wheaton girls.”\(^{61}\) The advertisement celebrates housework for women within the context of a college newspaper, instead of advertising opportunities for advanced degrees or careers. It is clear that the Wheaton community has subscribed to this ideal and has decided to start young women on this private path toward marriage early. The ad is clearly not targeted toward college women who were looking for careers after graduation who would need irons to dress professionally, but girls who would quickly be married and would commence control over the housework, including the ironing. The timing of this advertisements fits within the growth of the number of marriages at Wheaton during the postwar period.

Even though women had a more public role during World War II, they continued to marry earlier and more often. From 1940 to 1945, both the birth and marriage rates grew, which is unexpected based on the lack of men available during this time.\(^{62}\) As we know today, women’s employment outside of the home had an expiration date that would be the day after the war ended. Women were reminded again and again that their work was temporary, they had to retain their femininity, and that their familial roles took precedence.\(^{63}\) Right after the war, the proportion of all women who had entered the job

\(^{61}\) *Wheaton News*, 6 June 1948, Gebbie Archives.
\(^{63}\) Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 23.
market during the war had fell significantly. Women were heading home, and in the case of many women, into marriages. More emphasis on home and family life convinced many women that it was the right thing to do for their partners and for America. The push for marriage right after the war had ended was extremely evident at Wheaton College. The *Wheaton News* began including a “Rings and Bells” section, which announced engagements and marriages of current Wheaton students, beginning in the year the war ended, 1945. Before this, marriage and engagement announcements would most likely have been unnecessary, based on men’s absence and women’s active role on the Wheaton campus. Upon evaluating the amount and the frequency of these marriage and engagement announcements, 1947 was the year in which there was the most marriages and engagements with 86 marriages and engagements being announced over the course of that school year. After 1947 there is a dramatic drop in mass announcements with the lowest number of both equaling only 15 total in the year 1949. It is important to note that there was no requirement for announcing one’s engagement or marriage, but based on the high number and the fact that this column solely existed during this period, it seems that most people did make these announcements.

**Class of 1949:**

Data compiled with the Wheaton College Alumnae Sample (WCAS) for the class of 1949, whose members had essentially made up the first class in the postwar period who would have been affected by the switch in cultural and political influences on young women. The class of 1949 experienced a 72% graduation rate. This is a significant increase from the 59% graduation rate for the WCAS 1944 and reflects the influence of

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64 Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 24.
65 “Rings and Bells”, *Wheaton News*, Gebbie Archives.
the post-war democratization and expansion of higher education in America. In 1949, 17 majors of the graduates were represented out of a possible 26 majors that existed at Wheaton. There is an increase in both majors represented and majors offered between WCAS 1944 and WCAS 1949. This is partly to do with an increase in women graduating, and partly to do with the changes in the curriculum and majors offered during this time. Unfortunately, postwar emphases on women in reconstruction efforts, especially in the sciences were minimal. This is shown in a drop to 8% of all graduates who completed scientific majors from 18% in WCAS 1944.

Outside of college, women married less frequently than their counterparts in 1944 with only 76% of the respondents from the class of 1949 marrying at some part in their lives. Of this 76% that married during their lifetimes, 8% also married in the short 4 years from freshman to senior year like in the class of 1944, but 92% marry from the 0 to 12 years after graduation instead of 0 to 7 years. This is equal in ratio to the class of 1944, but incorporates a longer range in the years married post-graduation. In terms of Wheaton women’s work, the most popular jobs for women were teaching, secretarial work, or as a professor, taken from 15 different positions women held. Alumnae from the Class of 1949 women worked most often before marriage and less often at other points of their lives. Although WCAS 1944 showed 10% of women seeking advanced degrees after graduation, WCAS 1949 shows a decrease to only 5% of the class continuing their educations.

The memory of a world war would always remain at the forefront of the minds of the Wheaton community, but attitudes quickly changed as described by the *Wheaton News*. In an editorial running on November 16, 1946, Wheaton was exposed to the
difference between the war years and the postwar period. The author of the editorial said, “War years brought about a kind of interest, energy, and enthusiasm. Emotion was at a high pitch, trends were exaggerated, and tension ran at a live wire level. A cessation of war naturally caused a break down in this high emotionalism, the result being a relaxation.”66 In this case, the war was credited with provoking an eagerness for knowledge and change, as described earlier. It is simply the fact that the author felt the need to comment on the absence of the eagerness that shows a change between the war and the postwar period. The next few weeks after this editorial appeared in the *Wheaton News*, students wrote into the editor to express agreement with the author. Either way, students at Wheaton College were disappointed after the war with the lack of activity that had given them a sense of purpose.

It is this sense of the absence of excitement, hard work, and interest in education that most clearly classify the post-war period at Wheaton and for women throughout America. Women were in the public view throughout the war in one way or another, but when the war had finally ended, women became reacquainted with the private space of the home. By occupying a public role during the 1940s, women were able to make more positive changes for themselves and future generations. Women were interested and invested in bettering themselves, especially because they were seen as active citizens. Historian Susan Hartmann states, “Although no legal revolution transformed women’s position in the 1940s, by the end of that decade their status under the law as citizens, married women, and workers had made significant progress”.67 Unfortunately, although these legalities remained in place to help women achieve equality, both women and men

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67 Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 123.
were more interested in settling for the comforts of home. Most women, especially married women, lost their jobs at the wars end, even though most had wanted to save them.⁶⁸ Unfortunately, the postwar period and the ideals of a calmer America did not fit with the excitement of women’s work and changing gender roles; this was only useful in times of crisis. Although women had to prove themselves more often outside of the domestic sphere, they continued to make strides publicly.

⁶⁸ Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 90.
Chapter 2: Containment

At the beginning of the 1950s, a reporter sent out by *The Wheaton News* staff interviewed Wheaton women to find out their views on women in war. The question was, “If we had a third World War do you think that women should be drafted for the Armed Forces or defense work?” In most cases, the answer was no. Enveloped in the grand majority of the answers were Wheaton women’s ideas about the place of women in American society during the 1950s. In one example, a girl answered: “Women are
needed at home for defense work and jobs left by men. Leave the armed services up to volunteers.” In another case the answer was: “No. It is just as important for women to keep up the spirit on the home front and to retain their families.” Someone else said: “Women are too giddy to be on a battlefield; they’ll only distract the men. They can be just as much use at home if they are assigned to a job that fits their abilities.” But how can these answers come from the same Wheaton College where only six years earlier women in their exact positions were involved both home and abroad in a World War? Instead of a piqued interest in happenings abroad like Wheaton women showed during World War II, women would have at this point been confined to their role as protector of the home, both on the home front of America and in the family home, thereby confirming the belief that domestic containment had already infiltrated Wheaton College in certain ways. It almost seems as if the memory of women’s efforts and interest right after the war was erased and recreated in a way that depicts women as weak homebodies who would not be able to handle the pressures of war.69

The cessation of the immediate postwar period brought an end to discussion on the Wheaton campus of both intellectual curiosities with WWII and travel, but a separate dialogue continued that could be connected to both political and familial policies of looking inward towards protection. Fear of another world war consumed American consciousness, especially among the smaller conflicts of the late 1940s and 1950s. This fear would carry the policies of domestic containment throughout the nation, and would force both women and men to bend to ideals set for each of their genders. This time,

women’s role was completely different than the very public and active role they held during World War II.

**Travel:**

As the 1950s progressed, the Cold War conflict began to increase in different geographic regions with more countries becoming susceptible to both communist and capitalist threats. America actually engaged quite frequently with the outside world during containment because it was concentrated on spreading its influence throughout the world. At colleges and universities, this engagement played out within the context of study abroad programs and opportunities to garner a wider worldview. The Wheaton College Bulletin finally began to revisit the possibility of Junior Year Abroad during the school year 1951/1952. During that year, adequate foreign language ability was necessary for studying in France, Italy, Mexico and Switzerland. Over the next ten years, the study abroad program came to be defined as the possibility of study in France, Germany, Spain, or Switzerland. Except for Mexico, all of the countries were located within Europe. Studying abroad was not on the radar during the war and immediate postwar period, but fitting with the Wheaton community’s push to extend their travel outside of the United States, the program was reinstated during the early Cold War period. Although condensed mostly to Europe, Wheaton continued to engage with the outside world even during a period of containment within America.

**Vocational Opportunities:**

Even though Wheaton College promoted many more opportunities for employment after college during the 1950s, fewer women took these opportunities after

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graduation. Most of the information on both possible careers for Wheaton students and reported careers of alumnae came from the Placement Office, which was established as its own separate entity in 1952. Before this, the Alumnae Secretary undertook this duty as part of their work. Through the urging of both Dean Elizabeth Stoffregen May and Dean Leota Colpitts, the Placement Office was created.\(^72\) The creation of the Placement Office suggests an increased emphasis on vocational opportunities for the graduates. During the long 1950s, the Placement Office organized Vocational Conferences, which were attended by Wheaton students in order to expand on their knowledge of certain careers in presentations by alumnae holding a variety of jobs. The *Wheaton News* often included announcements of job opportunities, the careers of recent alumnae, and the Vocational Conferences.

Unfortunately, with this increase in opportunities came strict regulations for women about when they could pursue them. Women were expected by their higher education institutions to only pursue careers in the short period of time before marriage. They set these expectations for several reasons. The gendered division of labor did not enable the same type of upward mobility that their male counterparts received. Also, women found it difficult to balance their primary task, homemaking, with the daily stresses that a career would provide. Men and women wanted to men to assume the dominant role in society after several decades of turmoil, which often meant that they were the only one to hold the wage earning title.\(^73\)

During the late 1940s, the changing relationship between the expectations of institutions of higher education for their female graduates and what the women actually

\(^{72}\) Trustee Minutes, 8 June 1952, Gebbie Archives.
\(^{73}\) May, *Homeward Bound*, 83-86.
did with their degrees changed dramatically. At the end of the war, women’s role as a homemaker, wife, and mother was projected to the entire American population and women’s professional lives lessened in importance. According to historian Susan Hartmann, women were drawn away from traditionally feminine jobs such as teaching in favor of opportunities in military and civilian employment that would provide better pay.\(^\text{74}\) In this case, America as a whole benefited from the introduction of women into these jobs, as manpower was desperately needed. When the war ended in 1945, women were no longer needed, and were sent either back to the home or in professions that were typically feminine. Hartmann states, “Vocational guidance manuals persistently emphasized fields where women would face little competition from men, and career counseling of women was predicated on the assumption that most would marry and that the relationship would take precedence over career aspirations.”\(^\text{75}\) As the decade progressed, women’s opportunities for employment mostly came in supporting roles for men’s work. When women did pursue a career after graduation at the end of the 1940s, it was a job that was conducive to marriage shortly after graduation.\(^\text{76}\)

At Wheaton College, this changed played out based on what the administration of the college proposed to the graduates as possible career paths, and what graduates actually ended up doing with their degrees. This relationship became increasingly more difficult to consider the same at the end of the 1940s, when women were given opportunities for employment, but were refusing to spend much time in full time careers. Throughout the long 1950s, the administration encouraged women to follow career paths

\(^{74}\) Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 103.

\(^{75}\) Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 113.

\(^{76}\) Hartmann, *The Home Front and Beyond*, 114.
through the institution of the Vocational Conferences, but women often chose instead to work briefly in the short period before they married.

It wasn’t until late in the 1940s that the purpose of women’s education at the university level was explained at Wheaton. Throughout World War II women entered college for multiple reasons. Throughout the 1940s, women faced conflicting messages about their role on college campuses. Most women didn’t want to deviate too far from the feminine ideal that would placed marriage as the ultimate reward and best outcome for four years of hard work at college, but at the same time, women became useful proponents to which the United States government dictated the war effort.  

At Wheaton College, the college bulletin from the school year 1948/1949 explained this complicated stance of the purpose of women’s education. According to that Bulletin’s History & Characteristics section at this time, the purpose of a college education was to ensure that all students are exposed to a career for a short time. “The curriculum offers a broad cultural foundation on general education and a limited amount of specialization in the belief that such a program constitutes the best preparation for life and for a career no matter what that career may be.” The emphasis is on the fact that most graduates will hold a career and they will be specialized in their jobs, as they were in their studies. Vocational Conferences:

Beginning in 1945, the Alumnae Office at Wheaton College put on several Vocational Conferences for the current students to learn about and explore possibilities for careers and jobs after graduation. During these conferences, alumnae who held a

77 Faehmel, *College Women in the Nuclear Age*, 40.
79 Faehmel, *College Women in the Nuclear Age*, 22.
variety of jobs would come to speak to small groups of students about the ins and outs of their professions. Based on the professions that were present at the conferences, it is easy to understand the jobs that were acceptable for women to do, or the professions that Wheaton College would want its graduates to enter. The conference in 1945 promoted opportunities for work such as civil service such as civil service, business, the American Red Cross, merchandising, and occupational therapy. There is an emphasis on health and recovery in light of the end of World War II through the inclusion of professions in the Red Cross and occupational therapy, where many soldiers were returning home with life changing injuries. Most jobs show women at the forefront of American life and not in supporting roles to men. The next Vocational Conference occurred in 1946, which advertised jobs in advertising, publishing, and airlines. In 1947, the conference includes a telephone company, teaching insurance, and public relations. The inclusion of teaching after World War II show the fact that more traditional feminine jobs were waiting for women after college, instead of careers that could be for both men or women. Throughout the 1940s women continued under the assumption that there were more opportunities available to them in traditionally masculine fields, which lasted until the late 1940s, when the emergence of the division of labor reemerged.

The first Vocational Conference of the 1950s occurred in March of 1950. The speakers for the conference were in a much greater variety of careers including advertising, business, chemical research, civil service, insurance, interior decorating, international service, law, library work, medicine, merchandising, museum work,

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80 Vocational Conference 1945, Vocational Conference Files, Gebbie Archives.
81 Vocational Conference 1946, Vocational Conference Files, Gebbie Archives.
82 Vocational Conference 1947, Vocational Conference Files, Gebbie Archives.
occupational therapy, personnel, physical therapy, publishing, radio, secretarial work, and teaching. With such a wide range of professions represented by different people, it is easy to discern that the Vocational Conference of 1950 was a big event and its massive size points to an increase in interest in professional careers for women. It appears that a career would be the most important option for a woman based on the Vocational Conference, and the choice in keynote speaker supports this. Lillian Moller Gilbreth was described in the March 3rd, 1950 edition of the Wheaton News as “an international leader in management engineering” and the president of Gilbreth, Inc. In her own right, Mrs. Gilbreth was a businesswoman, scholar, and innovator who had transcended boundaries that were acceptable for women in the post-war years. Her and her husband “pioneered industrial management techniques still in use today”. Interestingly, even as distinguished as she was for her time, her talk still incorporated her work in engineering with efficient homemaking. Describing her talk later, the News says, “She then emphasized the care with which one must pick a job, whether it be in the field of industry and business or in that of home and family.” Her talk emphasized helpful tips for careers that could also apply to homemaking, which connects to Wheaton’s conflicting idea about future career and marriage for students during the beginning of the 1950s. Gilbreth’s position in the 1950 Vocational Conference perfectly encapsulates women’s

83 “Mrs. Gilbreth Emphasizes Four Criteria For Jobs”, Wheaton News, 10 March 1950, Gebbie Archives and Vocational Conference 1950, Vocational Conference Files, Gebbie Archives.
84 “Mrs. L. Gilbreth Speaks on ‘You And Your Job’”, Wheaton News, 3 March 1950, Gebbie Archives.
86 “Mrs. Gilbreth Emphasizes Four Criteria For Jobs”, Wheaton News, 10 March 1950, Gebbie Archives.
new role in American. As they were increasingly involved in careers, homemaking was still a main focus in their lives.

The following year in 1951, in place of a true Vocational Conference, the Placement Office had Mrs. Mary Hume Maguire, who was on “the faculty of Katherine Gibbs Secretarial School in Boston” speak to Wheaton students about the possibility of secretarial work after graduation.87 This is indicative of the new push for women in supporting career roles such as secretarial work to men as administrators. Although this year’s Vocational Conference promoted work, the type of work (such as secretarial work) that it emphasized was not something that one would be able to easily make a career out of, but rather an opportunity to make money before marriage. The next Vocational Conference took place in 1952. The careers offered included advertising, armed service, banking, biology, civil service, distribution, foreign service, industry, insurance, interior decoration, journalism, library work, museum work, nursing, personnel, physical science, public relations, publishing, radio and television, religious work, secretarial work, social service and teaching.88 Most of the careers remained constant between 1950 and 1951. The following year, 1953, the conference included even more possible careers. These included advertising, art, botany, chemistry, economic research, government, library services, journalism, languages, mathematical science, medical services, merchandising, personnel, psychological service, public relations, radio and television, recreational leadership, religious education, secretarial work, social work, teaching, and writing and

88 Vocational Conference 1952, Vocational Conference Files, Gebbie Archives.
publishing. The subject of the keynote speech was “Professional Careers and Marriage” to be given by Mr. and Mrs. Ralph W. Hidy who were both former members of the Wheaton faculty. He taught history and she taught economics. At the time of the conference, “Mr. Hidy is professor of history at New York University, and Mrs. Hidy is research associate at Business History Foundation in New York.” This dichotomy between an increase in careers during each year of the 1950s and the emphasis on the combination of careers and marriages with the speakers is difficult to understand. The combination of career and marriage shows that women at Wheaton were given many options for their lives post-graduation during the long 1950s.

The next conference happened in 1955. Unfortunately, as the college moved into the late 1950s, there are fewer careers advertised than in earlier Vocational Conferences. In this case, the professions were advertising, biology, chemistry, economics research, radio, television, and magazine promotion, language, merchandising, music, science teaching, special libraries, television, travel, teaching, and art. The alumnae who become speakers at the college are not involved in such careers as government, medical work, journalism, and psychological services, all careers that signal a dominant and active role in the profession. Older women felt comfortable entering the workforce in larger numbers and in a greater number of professions during this time, whereas younger women of marrying age (like Wheaton students) did not have these advantages. As Elaine Tyler May states in her book, “The actual number of women in gainful employment continued to rise after the war, even though the range of employment available to them

89 Vocational Conference 1953, Vocational Conference Files, Gebbie Archives.
91 Vocational Conference 1955, Vocational Conference Files, Gebbie Archives.
narrowed.\textsuperscript{92} The final conference during the early Cold War period occurred in 1957. The keynote speaker was Mr. Abram T. Collier, who was the Vice President and General Counsel of the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company in Boston, which would indicate that a slightly more professional tone had been set at the previous Vocational Conferences. Significantly, it wasn’t until the final Vocational Conference that the Placement Office brought a male speaker to campus. Additionally, the conference was split up into four general areas of concentration including literary and artistic, business, social and educational, and the economic, mathematical, and scientific fields and included the professions creative writing, economics research, personnel, social work, industrial chemistry, science teaching merchandising, music, textbook publishing, architecture, federal civil service, teaching, and electronic computing television.\textsuperscript{93} Just like the conference of 1955, there are fewer professions than during the early 1950s. This set up was “designed so that girls who have no specific ideas on future employment may explore many different possibilities and then examine thoroughly their two major choices.” It seems that conference was actually concentrated on providing an opportunity or Wheaton women to determine what career would fit their interests best, especially for those girls that did not have a set career path. Based on this evidence, this seems to be the case during 1957 over any other year.

During the 1940s to the 1960s, 1957 was the final conference of this type, which indicates that either employment after graduation ceased to be as important to the Wheaton community, or opportunities to learn about employment came from other sources besides the Vocational Conferences. Throughout the years that the Vocational

\textsuperscript{92} May, \textit{Homeward Bound}, 75.
\textsuperscript{93} Vocational Conference 1957, Vocational Conference Files, Gebbie Archives.
Conferences existed, women were urged to choose careers that would help them prepare for an emergency, to bolster the socioeconomic place of their family, or to find a husband before marriage. All of the institutions that would have made it easier for women to work had shut down after the war, including child-care facilities. This is shown in the Vocational Conferences, which emphasized a variety of jobs, but were not considered long-term careers as well as the intersection of jobs and marriage for women during the 1950s.

Alumnae Announcements

At Wheaton during the 1950s, graduates may have received many positive options for their lives after college, but after college it was difficult to profess these same options as women were expected to have a very specific plan in mind. This was shown in the announcements (or absence of) for the graduates of the late 1940s and 1950s. Contrasting the amount of announcements during the 1940s and 1960s, there is only a single announcement, and it showed a similar conformity to the specific life path. After 1948, there is no announcement of Wheaton graduates’ activity until 1955, which is advertised with the headline, “Job Hunting, Marriage, Travel, and Interesting Work Hold the Attention of Most Recent Wheaton Graduates.” Of the 81 students who responded, 44% are employed, 9 women are attending graduate school, 5 are in vocational training, 23 were married, of which 11 were working. Almost half of the graduates were in the workforce, which is indicative of the increase of female participation throughout the

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94 May, Homeward Bound, 79.
1950s. More female workers were in the labor force than during World War II.\textsuperscript{96} Although women had more opportunities in the workforce, the domestic ideology ran deep in their hearts and minds, and it is likely that they were only to be employed for a short time before marriage. Even among an increase in women’s higher education, which should lead to an increase in specialized careers that would boost women’s role in society, the push for traditional gender roles that prioritized their role as housewives, mothers, and wives took precedence over their college years.

**Class of 1954:**

In the end, cultural traditions won out in the battle for the futures of Wheaton College graduates. In the Wheaton College Alumnae Survey for 1954, a 63% of all entering freshmen graduated as seniors. This is in comparison to a 72% completion rate for WCAS 1949. In terms of majors represented by WCAS 1954, the graduates represented 17 different majors out of a possible 23 that they were able to choose from. This decrease from 26 majors in 1949 to 23 majors in 1954 represents the curricular reorganization that Wheaton experienced in the late 1940s. Interestingly, there is a greater percentage of scientific majors represented within the class of 1954 than any other year. The class of 1954 experiences a slight increase to 13% in scientific majors up from 8% for the class of 1949.

Moving on from women’s lives during college, their lives in the post-college years can also be indicative of the traditions of domesticity during the 1950s. The class of 1954 had 79% married at some point in their lives. This is up from 76% for the WCAS 1949. In 1954, only 3% were reported to have married between freshman and senior year,

\textsuperscript{96} LaFeber et al., *The American Century*, 100.
but another 78% married in less than three years after graduation. Of the Class of 1954, 68% held some type of employment during their lifetimes. This may have had to with increased opportunities offered at Wheaton through the Vocational Conferences. The most popular jobs for women from the class of 1954 included secretarial work, teaching, and library work. Women were mostly in professions that were suitable for women such as teaching, or were considered supporting professions to their male counterparts, such as secretarial work. Women from the WCAS 1954 worked most often equally until they were married as they did after their children were gone. In terms of advanced study, 21% of the class of 1954 sought graduate degrees. This is a large increase from WCAS 1949 where only 5% of graduates received advanced degrees. The class of 1954 represents the anomalous nature of the 1950s. In some ways Wheaton women, as in the information provided by WCAS 19454, were not as influenced by the politics of domestic containment that shrouded America during this time. It is unfair to the Wheaton graduates from the 1950s to assume that all of their lives played out in the same manner, especially when the data points to a variety of paths those Wheaton women chose to take. Moving forward into the 1950s, domestic containment seemed to have more of an affect on Wheaton graduates for a variety of women, but at this point, women’s experiences were not homogenous.

**Women in Higher Education:**

During the 1950s, college was a very different place at Wheaton and most other colleges based on the increase in people and the change in curriculum. In 1955, the Board of Trustees and the college administration undertook a major expansion effort. Both wanted to increase enrollment in order to meet increasing national education standards
and the promise that application rates would be high based on the population explosion of the “baby-boomers”. In order to increase enrollments, the college would also need to provide dormitories, classroom buildings, and dining halls in order to house the additional students. Action was not taken until President Meneely went on sabbatical leave during the spring semester of 1955 and Dean Elizabeth May resumed his position as acting president. Throughout the course of the semester, she and her colleagues developed studies and made plans to expand the college to between 700 and 800 students within the next few years, although they continued to expand to over one thousand students during the 1960s. In the opinion of the Board of Trustees, “a larger enrollment would allow the development of both a fuller curriculum and better academic facilities, which would, it hoped, make the College more attractive to better qualified students.” It is important to note Wheaton’s expansion as it prepared to enter the 1960s, because it shows the effect of heightened emphasis on higher education throughout America, as well as Wheaton’s wish for a better education for it’s students.\footnote{Helmreich, et al., \textit{Wheaton College 1834-1957}, 490-500.}

Although expansion would eventually cause many changes on the Wheaton campus, the 1950s continued to be a period of conflicting ideas about the purpose of women’s education. At Wheaton, this is shown in several different examples. The first connection to women’s role in higher education comes from 1953. It is at this time that a number of songs from the satirical musical depicting life at Wheaton performed annually. One in particular, called “Ad Building Song” appeared in March 19, 1953 in the \textit{Wheaton News} and incorporated the idea that higher education, particularly at Wheaton, was contradictory notion that forced young women to choose whether to be academic or
social. In the song, the author describes life at Wheaton as being concentrated on the social events of the weekend. “I know that weekends start Wednesday and that they end Monday night and if you copy all Tuesday you’ll get the lectures all right.”98 It appears that higher education for women is not to be taken as seriously, as the girls who are benefiting from the education are solely there to take advantage of the social aspects of college, which involve leaving campus to find a husband. This dichotomy is described clearly when the author states, “You can either date or make Phi Bete, which pin appeals to you? But above all don’t study; play dumb whatever you do!” It is possible to take this song as a critique of the atmosphere of Wheaton that promoted the decision of being either academic or social but not both.

The next example of the benefit of women’s higher education comes from Wesleyan University in 1957. On November 21st, 1957 the Wheaton News reprinted a piece that was originally included in the Wesleyan Argus. A female alumna wrote it in response to a student’s father’s commentary on the increasing college enrollment and the harsh conditions at colleges across America. Apparently, the letter “urged girls to ‘stay home so more boys, the future breadwinners, can be educated…” She attacks his logic by sharing the benefits of educating women, even if they do turn out to only become housewives, mothers, and civic worker. Some of her reasons include the necessity “to understand and share the interests and problems of her college-educated husband” and of “developing a child's moral, intellectual, and cultural personality.”99 Both reasons can be seen as valid given the historical context, but neither deal with the issue that women need higher education in order to succeed in careers for themselves, but

given the fact that this announcement emerged in the late 1950s, it seems that most Americans did not share this insight. The fact that the *Wheaton News* printed this article points to the fact that the Wheaton community thought the discussion was provocative, but could be consoled in the fact that they were doing so with their future profession as wife and mother in mind. The absence of a push for a career after higher education is concerning, but also explains the reluctance of Americans to allow women to diverge from their clearly defined gender roles that shut them inside the house.

**Intellectual Community:**

Women’s submissive role in the workplace, in the home, and in colleges during the 1950s did not allow them a prominent role in the spread of intellectual ideas, especially on college campuses. Women’s stance as independent people with their own minds and ideas had an expiration date, which was often when she married her husband who would begin to instill these ideas in her for her benefit. Women traded their independence for a secure and safe home, as well as companionship, the beginnings of this focus occurring in college.\(^{100}\) Women needed to be knowledgeable about issues in order to converse with their husbands, but not for their own benefit. In this way, the curriculum for women met this demand. Many institutions decided to help their female graduates by providing stronger home economics programs and new marriage courses, downplaying the academics section of their curriculum for most of those who would inevitably choose the conventional life path.\(^{101}\) Oftentimes, this played out while women were in college in their willingness to engage with intellectual or academic life on campus. At Wheaton, there continued to be evidence of women exploring intellectual

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\(^{100}\) May, *Homeward Bound*, 86.

\(^{101}\) Faehmel, *College Women in the Nuclear Age*, 52-54.
ideas while in college, but as with other aspects of the post-war period, their commitment was less intense. Women continued to be involved on campus, but in a different way that emphasized their role in higher education for the benefit of their future lives as wives and mothers.

Politics:

In contrast to the full special issue of the election of 1948, both the elections of 1952 and 1956 were each downplayed in a different way. Instead, information about the candidates and their stances on certain issues was incorporated into the previous edition to the election. In both election years of the 1950s, there was a campus poll to determine which candidate the Wheaton community would have elected, which can be contrasted with the multiple articles devoted to explaining the policies so that the readers would have been able to make an informed decision in the 1940s. Women had less information available to them than in 1948, although arguably it was still present. Another example is the fact that the political column “Political Ramblings” or sometimes called “Political Fragments” continued to be published in the Wheaton News throughout the 1950s.

Babette Faehmel discusses the change (or lack thereof) of female students engaging with intellectual ideas while on college campuses during the 1950s. For her, uniformity and the communist threat stalled political and intellectual thought, but these ideas were still written and discussed by college women. This is partly to do with the fact that college campuses have been and will continue to be hotbeds of new ideas.\textsuperscript{102} It is evident that the atmosphere of America in the 1950s did not enable political and intellectual thought to be as strong as it was before, but it did still exist.

\textsuperscript{102} Faehmel, \textit{College Women in the Nuclear Age}, 46-47.
Owning Education:

A change is reflected almost a decade later in the Cold War period, when there was a survey sent out to Wheaton students, which was reported on October 24th, 1957 and was sent out by the sociology department. The point of the survey was to see what reasons Wheaton students claimed for attending college. “When queried as to what the student expected from college, the results showed that an academic education was the prime goal. A well-adjusted social life was secondary, but not to be overlooked.”103 Based on the fact that education was placed first in the response to the survey, it seems that it was of real importance to Wheaton students. The addition of the social life, which most likely meant dating on the weekends based on this particular time period in Wheaton’s history, is indicative of the fact that Wheaton women’s futures were also dependent on their ability to establish romantic ties in college rather than solely through opportunities that a good education could provide for further study or a career. The emphasis on a healthy social life was not just a phenomenon at Wheaton. In Babette Faehmel’s work, social life and dating continued to pop up in the diary entries and letters that she looked at with much more frequency during the post-war years.104 This sharp change from an emphasis on education to the sociological survey makes sense within the framework of the late 1950s, during which the value of an education was deemphasized within the intellectual community of Wheaton.

**Dating**

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104 Faehmel, *College Women in the Nuclear Age*, 45.
Cultural ideas during the long 1950s valued the home and domesticity for women. After two long decades of hardship, American people wanted the comforts of home and conformed to these ideals wholeheartedly.\textsuperscript{105} The emphasis of popular culture and the government on women’s role as reproductive agents cemented these ideas within the context of a fear-driven Cold War. Women were well aware of their role in American society and colleges conformed to the pattern that was set, so even college-educated women felt that their true role was to occupy the home. Paul Helmreich details this progression for women in the post-war world. “For many attending eastern women’s colleges, marriage to a slightly older college man or recent graduate with good prospects, often before finishing college herself, was seen as normal, even desirable – an acceptable end result of the college experience.”\textsuperscript{106} In conjunction with this growing anxiety about where men and women fit in American society was the flood of men onto college campuses, making dating a common and necessary activity for young people. Through dating, these cultural policies could blossom successfully, where women’s main concern became to find a partner to get married as early as possible. Shared ideas about conformity made this process possible in post-war America.

Dances:

Wheaton College set up many opportunities for the students to interact with these ideals about the true purpose of women’s role in post-war America. Oftentimes, social life could be found off-campus at men’s schools, but Wheaton also scheduled dances and mixers on campus. These events were incredibly important to the ability of Wheaton students to secure a husband before graduation. In a typical mixer at Wheaton, men from

\textsuperscript{105} May, \textit{Homeward Bound}, 198.
\textsuperscript{106} Helmreich, \textit{Wheaton College 1834-1957}, 469.
the single-sex schools nearby would arrive at Wheaton by the busload for the night in order to dance and meet future spouses.\textsuperscript{107} An example of the emphasis on dating comes from the October 13\textsuperscript{th}, 1950 issue of the \textit{Wheaton News}, which reported on a typical dance for the beginning of the school year called the “Acquaintance Dance”, where different men’s colleges were introduced to Wheaton’s entering class. The purpose of this dance was to spark romances between each group of freshman in a situation that could be awkward or amusing, depending on who you were. Of the dance, the \textit{Wheaton News} stated: “While green-eyed upperclassmen watched from the balcony, freshmen Paul Jones’ed and flirted below.”\textsuperscript{108} This description evokes the expectation that by the time they were upperclassmen, Wheaton women were supposed to have already possessed a possible suitor or be engaged. Their jealousy for the freshmen girls conveys the desperate need for possibilities of a date and the pressures put upon them to have completed this life stage.

Another example from the \textit{Wheaton News} comes from October 9\textsuperscript{th}, 1958 and describes a new idea for a dance, called the “Last Chance Dance.” At the event, unengaged or “unpinned” senior girls will gather with their male graduate student counterparts for one last chance to find the love of their lives before they resign themselves to being “career girls” and true failures. The “lucky” senior girls who are already committed to someone were the servers and hostesses at the dance. “No longer must the stately but unpinned or unengaged senior girl hide furtively in the library or in

\textsuperscript{107} Helmreich, \textit{Wheaton College 1834-1957}, 469-470.  
\textsuperscript{108} “Inquiring Reporter”, \textit{Wheaton News}, 13 October 1950, Gebbie Archives.
the sound proof Young study smoker.”\textsuperscript{109} This was an interesting event for many reasons. Based on the culture of the time, Wheaton women were under pressure to find a husband before leaving college. The popular motto at Wheaton and other women’s colleges was a “ring before spring”.\textsuperscript{110} Those who were already engaged were regarded as fortunate and praised while those with more experience regarded those who had not chosen this lifestyle as failures in need of saving and assistance. It is in this situation that it becomes clear that the original path that seemed to be more frequently during World War II of intellect had been replaced by one that praised marriage directly after graduation.

Men’s Schools:

The \textit{Wheaton News} was not just clued in when reporting on the visits that the men made to campus, but they often went out of their way during the 1950s to report on what was happening at their own schools. The section “Cream of Wheaton” which steadily appeared during the 1940s until 1950s reported not only on Wheaton gossip, but also on that of surrounding schools as well. In particular, in their first column, on October 28\textsuperscript{th}, 1949, was very typical of the column throughout the years, when they reported on the happenings at Harvard, letting the campus know that “the Harvard Bus may come so rush up on your investments and stock market reports and get acquainted. Harvard has lost all their games this fall – maybe they need more Wheaton girls in the cheering section!”\textsuperscript{111}

The fact that this section existed clearly states how much the men and women’s schools were intermixed. In addition, a small blurb appears on February 17\textsuperscript{th}, 1950 that reports on the fact that both Yale and Princeton proms would be occurring on the same day. The


\textsuperscript{110} Helmreich, \textit{Wheaton College 1834-1957}, 469.

\textsuperscript{111} “Cream of Wheaton”, \textit{Wheaton News}, 28 October 1949, Gebbie Archives.
article follows by asking a series of questions on Wheaton women’s preference for either Yale or Princeton.\textsuperscript{112} It seems that many students will be forced to choose between one prom and the other and that this is a true predicament for many women. When it comes to their own prom, the Wheaton community looked forward to hosting all the men in attendance that would stand in as dates for the women. Another popular practice of the \textit{Wheaton News} was the “Dance Lists”, which named the Wheaton student, her accompanying date to one of the annual dances, and where he went to school.\textsuperscript{113} On February 12\textsuperscript{th}, 1953, the \textit{Wheaton News} summarized a survey that they sent out detailing which school each of the men came from, with the most popular school being Harvard followed by Brown, Yale, and Dartmouth. “By oxcart, airplane, boat, train and thumb they are arriving in the Dimple, to be chased around Peacock Pond, stared at in philosophy and in the dining rooms, and to be smiled at by everyone’s roommates.”\textsuperscript{114} Although the influx of men on the campus wasn’t normal, it was special and regarded with excitement as explained by the \textit{Wheaton News}. The News reported on what they thought the Wheaton community would want to read about and their constant inclusion of the activities of men throughout these years shows that the Wheaton community wanted to read about men.

Advertisements:

Through an analysis of the \textit{Wheaton News}, it seems that it operated as a regular newspaper would during the time period. This included advertisements that were meant to invoke certain sentiments for Wheaton students. In the book, \textit{Women’s Magazine’s}
1940-1960, historian Nancy A. Walker states: “Indeed, the very existence of mass-circulation periodicals designed largely to instruct women in their appearance, duties, and values reveals fundamental differences between attitudes toward female and male gender roles.” At this time more than ever before in American history, women used forms of print media to understand their roles within society. An extremely telling advertisement was included in the Wheaton News on October 3rd, 1957 from the New York Times and its message promotes dating through a feminine ideal. “Men look for well-rounded companions. They want girls who share their interests. You can know more about male and female interests by reading the New York Times every day. Its colorful articles make the news fun to know and exciting to read. The Times is much more interesting… and you will be too… on dates, in class, in gab-sessions.” It is clear that the ideal of the female college student has changed over the course of the 1950s, which has created a new stereotype of women who can only be intellectual in order to have an equal conversation with a man. Even the New York Times, a well-regarded newspaper, has incorporated this ideal in their advertising and has promoted dating and a social life as the true path of a female college student. The Wheaton community would have viewed these advertisements in their local paper and known that Wheaton College as a whole would have also promoted these convoluted stereotypes of what they should have kept important to them and embodied them in certain ways.

Marriage:

116 “What’s inside your pretty head?”, Wheaton News, 3 October 1957, Gebbie Archives.
There are other examples of Wheaton’s promotion and creation of the female college student as boy crazy that do not fit into any other category. In another instance, the graduation issue of the Wheaton News on June 6th, 1954 describes Wheaton as the “diamond ring school of the East” and the small article is meant to congratulate all the Wheaton graduates who would be married immediately after graduation. It praises the young women who were able to “find time between their seminars and generals for the soft music, candles and romance in life.”\(^{117}\) The elements of praise and pressure in connection with marriage are common themes during the 1950s at Wheaton that are not found as often during the other decades of the early Cold War period. Even the Wheaton News, a small college newspaper, has adopted the ideals of the feminine mystique in order to push educated women into the narrow future as wives, mothers, and housewives.

Marriage Counselors:

The Wheaton community did not solely cater to girls who were dating, but it also responded to the increasing majority of students who were married while also attending college. A practice that was popular in the 1950s at Wheaton was to bring marriage counselors to campus. It seems that if the counselors were invited to speak and consult the students on campus, there was both an interest and a need for their services. With all the emphasis on the family in America, familial stability was of great concern. As Elaine Tyler May said, “Postwar America was the era of the expert.”\(^{118}\) Men and women looked to professionals to give them the answers to their daily lives, including their personal lives. Marriage counseling was a particularly important model that began as early as for

\(^{117}\) “Diamond Ring School of the East Sees Seniors as Blushing Brides”, Wheaton News, 6 June 1954, Gebbie Archives.

\(^{118}\) May, Homeward Bound, 29.
women in college, who were considered the biggest detriment to rising birthrates. Postwar America hoped that by counseling young people on how to have successful marriages, they would stay married longer and would produce more children.\footnote{Faehmel, \textit{College Women in the Nuclear Age}, 53.}

The first example of this occurred on March 14\textsuperscript{th}, 1952. The speaker of the event was Reverend Rollin J. Fairbanks and a discussion period followed the talk. It did not seem to be a very large or outlandish affair, but instead was presented as a response to the increasing rate of marriage at Wheaton.\footnote{“Marriage Counselor Will Talk March 18 Discussion Follows”, \textit{Wheaton News}, 14 March 1952, Gebbie Archives.} The intensification of the second event can be connected to the surge of marriages in the late 1950s. The speaker was Mr. L. Dearborn, who was considered a marriage expert during this time period. This presents a change from the early 1950s, when marriage counseling was wrapped up in religious advising. Later in the 1950s, marriage counseling was considered both an academic discipline and professional career. Instead of one lecture and one discussion like in 1952, the marriage event in 1959 included a “series of lectures to the students in Health Instruction during their regular class periods”, “two informal group discussions”, a meeting with engaged girls and the freshman class, and “individual conferences”, which could be scheduled for anytime during his stay by members of the Wheaton community. The professionalization of marriage counseling as well as the explosion in size of the marriage-counseling event can be connected to the increasing number of marriages during the late 1950s.\footnote{“Mrs. L. Dearborn, Marriage Expert, Will Give Lecture”, \textit{Wheaton News}, 5 March 1959, Gebbie Archives.}

Rings and Bells:
During the years between 1954 and 1959, 40 became the average total engagements and marriages reported by the *Wheaton News*. The year 1952 saw an increase from 23 announcements in 1951 to 40 announcements in 1952. The high rate stayed mostly consistent throughout the 1950s, never dipping below 33 announcements in 1955, but steadily holding to the mid-40s during the end of the decade. In 1959, there were 46 announcements, a record high for this decade. The explosion of announcements during the late 1950s connects to the rising attrition rates during this same time period showing that the frequency of engagements and marriages was connected to women leaving college with their education unfinished. It was not required to submit a marriage or engagement announcement so many people might have neglected this practice, but the sheer number of announcements over the course of this period indicates that doing so would be a source of pride for most girls, particularly based on some of the other sources during this period that show how much the college was focused on the family.122

**Class of 1959:**

The Class of 1959, based on the information provided by the WCAS, showed a more homogeneity, especially as influenced by policies of domestic containment. In relation to the increase of 63% completion rate for the class of 1954, only 57% of entering freshmen graduated as seniors in the class of 1959. Of course women had multiple reasons for leaving college, but based on the time period and the atmosphere of Wheaton, it is likely that many of the women chose an early marriage over a degree. An increase from 16 different majors represented in 1954 increases to 19 majors out of a possible 21 offered. It is important to understand how Wheaton women in postwar

women interacted with their education and an indicator is the way they made use of their education. This came to include where they concentrated their studies, as a popular idea about college women in the Cold War period is that they were most represented in the humanities, which can also be connected to the rampant conformity during the 1950s.\textsuperscript{123} It is most concerning that the variety of majors was cut down significantly over the course of the 1950s. This may have had to do with disinterest in certain majors and the postwar de-emphasis on scientific majors, professional careers, and advanced degrees for women. For instance, in the year 1958/1959 one of the majors that were eliminated was the Mathematics-Physics major that was added during the years immediately after the war. Because of the elimination of the emphasis on scientific majors that was so prevalent during the war and immediately after, it is important to know how many women majored in the sciences during the 1950s. The percentage of students in the WCAS 1959 only graduated with 7\% of the scientific majors, a decrease from the 13\% in WCAS 1954. In many ways, the push for scientific postwar plans had died down significantly by the mid to late-1950s.

Moving on from women’s lives during college, their lives in the post-college years can also be indicative of the traditions of domesticity during the 1950s. In relation to the 79\% of Wheaton women who married in the class of 1954, 87\% of the class of 1959 married at some point in their lives. These figures fit easily within the postwar context of early marriages that were happening more often for young women as marriage became more important to Cold War policies and the happiness of Americans. Most importantly, a higher rate of attrition is explained by the fact that 28\% of those married

\textsuperscript{123} Faehmel, \textit{College Women in the Nuclear Age}, 52.
Wheaton women married between freshmen and senior year. In addition, 61% graduated in the three short years immediately following graduation. It was acceptable for women, even women who were immersed in an academic and professional setting, to marry early and retreat to their homes, or at the very least to have some work experience in the few short years before marriage. In terms of women’s work, only 46% of women in the WCAS 1959 reported on working during some point in their life, a steep decrease from the 68% of women in the WCAS 1954 who did. The most popular jobs for the class of 1959 were teaching, secretarial work, and advertising. As in 1954, the most popular jobs included traditionally feminine jobs as well as jobs that were meant to support men as the bosses. Of the percentage of women who worked during their lifetimes, they most often worked until marriage, but not at any other point. In terms of advanced degrees, only 10% of Wheaton women from the WCAS 1959 reported to be attending a program. This is in comparison to the 21% of the WCAS 1954 that did. In all of these ways, conditions at Wheaton enabled domestic containment to blossom and this is shown by the willingness of women in the class of 1959 to follow these policies.

An amusing song from the yearly production Vodvil called “The Left-Handed Song” was included in the Wheaton News on April 6th, 1951. The lyrics of the song portray a girl’s serious desire to get married and be “left-handed”, or show off the ring on her left hand, after she sees that her roommate has returned from Christmas break engaged. “But ‘one day he’ll come along’ the man who’ll be all mine. And then I’ll be left-handed too.”124 Upon reading into the song, it seems that there was a lot of social power in showing oneself off as engaged and jealousy could be easily procured from

those who did not find a husband during the college years. The pressure that was
described in “The Left-Handed Song” to marry early during the 1950s seems to have
affected all Wheaton women, most especially during the 1950s. Women who graduated
from Wheaton in the late 1950s, such as the class of 1959 were under even more
pressures to conform based on the fact that they had been fully immersed in the Cold War
for a longer period of time than their sisters that had graduated even just five years
earlier. This pressure is the result of U.S. policies towards the Cold War. As containment
of communism came to be enacted in America by domestic containment, women bore
most of the burden. They were the keepers of the home; the ones who would stay home
and make a safe life for their husbands and their children. It may have been a sacrifice,
but to them at the time, it was worth it.
Chapter 3: The 1960s

Wheaton women who graduated during the 1960s had to balance the domestic ideals of the 1950s with the underlying current of political change that had begun to infiltrate American consciousness as a result of the beginning of the Civil Rights movement and the war in Viet Nam. Ann Reeves, Wheaton College graduate of 1964, wrote: “For me the tension was almost unbearable, balancing Betty Friedan in one hand (left) and Bride Magazine in the other (right), making a choice not to go to Selma because I was several months pregnant, finding a baby sitter so I could protest an undeclared war in Southeast Asia.” This balance was uneasy for women in the early and
md-1960s to maintain, and it put pressures on them that were different than those they had been under in previous decades. Ann Reeves described her cohort as “the in between generation caught between two entirely different sets of social values.” In an increasingly politicized culture that continued to operate under the demise of increased domestic containment, these ideas became two confusing messages that women were forced to contend with.

As the 1950s turned into the early part of the 1960s, a lot of changes took place, while a lot of the sentiments from the previous decade remained. The mixture of old and new characterized Wheaton College during the early part of the 1960s. Women were given more opportunities to succeed, but when they finally did they were still under rigid gender norms that would need another ten years to change. The 1950s can be classified as a decade of conformity and passivity in American society, which can be connected to the mounting tensions during the Cold War. Fear spread like wildfire throughout America, and people craved a sense of normality that could be derived from a sense of security within their homes and with their families. As the Cold War continued throughout the 1960s and into later decades, this sentiment was still rampant. The emphasis on traditional gender roles created pressures for women at Wheaton and college women in general as it had for their counterparts during the 1950s. At the same time, a new era was beginning: John F. Kennedy, the brilliant new president, would shake up America and the stance of the Cold War. The ideals of conformity throughout American society became less popular. New ideas were beginning to take form during this early 1960s period, which slightly altered the prescribed role for women that has been so rigid during the

125 Class Letter, Class of 1964, General Files, Gebbie Archives.
previous decade. Women at Wheaton continued to be influenced by the pressures to
marry early, but they were also more likely to finish all four years of their undergraduate
degree as well as to begin careers or go to graduate school after graduation.

The dichotomy between passivity in the 1950s and activity during the 1960s can
be seen through the change of presidencies between President Eisenhower and President
Kennedy. Although Eisenhower was immersed in smaller military conflicts throughout
his presidency, he only let these “police actions” affect the lives of the American public
very minimally. Instead, he continued to focus on rebuilding the home front by
strengthening both the economy and the educational system.126 Life was quietly moving
along during the years of Eisenhower, and he made sure of that throughout the two terms
of his presidency. The difference between the Eisenhower years and the Kennedy years
was quite drastic. Kennedy epitomized something that he called the New Frontier, in
which he urged the American people to open their minds to what still had to be done
within the United States and worldwide. In his Democratic National Convention
Nomination Acceptance Address in July of 1960 in Los Angeles, John F. Kennedy stated:
“Beyond that frontier are uncharted areas of science and space, unsolved problems of
peace and war, unconquered problems of ignorance and prejudice, unanswered questions
of poverty and surplus”.127 Kennedy’s call to action contrasted markedly with
Eisenhower’s choice not to involve the larger American culture in the nation’s
involvement in the Cold War. As Eisenhower left office he shared a sentiment contrary to

126 LaFeber, et al., The American Century, 103.
National Convention Address." American Rhetoric: John F. Kennedy -- 1960 Democratic
National Convention Address.
Kennedy’s in his Farewell Address to the Nation. “This conjunction of an immense military establishment and a large arms industry is new in the American experience. The total influence – economic, political, even spiritual – is felt in every city, every Statehouse, every office of the Federal government. We recognize the imperative need for this development. Yet we must not fail to comprehend its grave implications.”

Eisenhower warned the American people of the dangers of the same action that Kennedy had called for a year earlier. Kennedy speech had declared, “For the world is changing. The old era is ending. The old ways will not do.” The change in presidencies brought a change in the order of America. While old influences from the passive 1950s remained, real change was being ushered into American consciousness. Gender roles acquired more fluidity, especially for young college aged women. New ideas about women’s roles were being introduced thanks to Betty Friedan and her influential work *The Feminine Mystique* and the establishment of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women, and later the changes made by the National Organization for Women. Although the women’s liberation movement did not fully emerge for several years during the mid to late 1960s, some changes were beginning to stir within certain communities. A common bond and awakening had been created and could no longer be ignored. Women were beginning to understand that a new America was in front of them, full of promises of change and

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equality, some of which could be reserved for a transition to more equal rights between the sexes.\textsuperscript{130}

**Travel**

Based on findings in the *Wheaton News*, it seems that although the Wheaton community had not been contained within the U.S. in the postwar era, Wheaton women were not looking to expand their reach further than Europe before the early 1960s. At that point, curiosities finally could expand beyond the Western world. In particular, President Kennedy’s foreign policies increasingly focused on the emerging areas that would be key to Cold War victories for the United States.\textsuperscript{131} Evidence of increased interest in areas beyond Northern Europe on the Wheaton campus began with an article published on March 1, 1962, which explained the inception of a new Spanish house for Spanish-speaking members of the Wheaton community who would like to have an “authentic residence”.\textsuperscript{132} Just a few weeks later, on March 15, 1962, an advertisement appeared for a Burmese Woman speaker whose topic was “eastern social views.” This example shows the Wheaton community looking beyond the scope of Western culture. On October 24\textsuperscript{th}, 1963 the *Wheaton News* included an opportunity for a scholarship for graduate study at a place in Hawaii called the East-West Center. There were several important facets of the advertisement. First, it spoke to Wheaton College women’s interest in people and cultures beyond the Western world. The ad copy noted, “The Center was established by Act of Congress to promote better understanding among the peoples of Asia, the Pacific Islands,

\textsuperscript{130} LaFeber, et al., *The American Century*, 162-163.

\textsuperscript{131} LaFeber, et al., *The American Century*, 142.

\textsuperscript{132} “Wheaton Experiments In International Living”, *Wheaton News*, 1 March 1952, Gebbie Archives.
and the United States.”\footnote{“Study In Honolulu”, \textit{Wheaton News}, 24 October 1963, Gebbie Archives.} Since the ad encouraged graduate study rather than simply travel, it would seem that attending graduate school was emphasized in the early 1960s more than it had been in the 1940s. This is indicated by the willingness of the East-West Center to provide everything that would be needed in order to embark on a graduate experience after a student had been granted the scholarship: “Full tuition, living expense, round-trip transportation from student’s home, and a small personal allowance are provided.” The fact that the advertisement appeared in a newspaper from an all woman’s college seems to indicate an effort to equalize women’s and men’s graduate education during this part of the Cold War.

\textbf{Vocational Opportunities}

It was during this period that domestic containment began to lose its grip on American society. Even though it was mostly the younger generations that were credited with changing some of these ideologies, credit is also due to parents (especially mothers in this case) who had realized that change was too late for them, but encouraged their daughters towards new paths into careers and graduate degrees. Cold War housewives realized that they did not want the same unhappiness and life path for their daughters and raised them with this in mind, leading to an increase in women’s participation in both higher education and the workforce.\footnote{May, \textit{Homeward Bound}, 207.} These new paths pushed young women into careers as well as into advanced degree programs as never before, which was especially true at Wheaton based on new emphasis on plans for graduates. Betty Friedan herself urged housewives to seek out jobs, careers, degrees or volunteer opportunities to give meaning to their lives. (SOURCE) It is within this changing atmosphere that Wheaton
women decided how they wanted to spend their lives after graduation. Although the Vocational Conferences ended in 1957, it is clear that opportunities for careers after graduation were not discouraged during the 1960s but rather they became even more important for Wheaton graduates during the early years of the 1960s.

Bulletin

The Wheaton College Bulletin demonstrated increased emphasis of the Wheaton administration on careers after graduation over any of the other paths including marriage. Instead of reporting on the career offerings that Wheaton graduates could take part in “at least for a little while”, as had been the case throughout the 1950s, the *Wheaton News* of the 1960s shows a complete bonding between an education at Wheaton and a full-time career or advanced study after graduation through a completely new word choice and by highlighting the Placement Office as having a more active role. This new attitude was evident beginning in the Bulletin for the school year 1962/1963: “Since the majority of Wheaton students enter a profession or vocation or continue their education immediately after graduating, the college maintains an active placement office. This office keeps on file for each student a resume and faculty references, which are made available to personnel directors and admission officers. Recruiting officers representing a variety of businesses and professions come to campus every year to interview seniors seeking employment”.135 The emphasis on a future that did not depend completely on marriage for a Wheaton graduate’s livelihood was included in the choice of “the majority.” The Placement Office had increased in importance since the 1950s, given that it was stressed in the opening History and Characteristics section of the college bulletin. A Placement

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Office had also been active in the 1940s and 1950s through the Vocational Conferences, but the choices for a career came in addition to the realization that women would have a supporting role to their male counterparts because their employment had an expiration date when they married or had children. By 1962/1963, there was no mention of women’s assuming a supporting role or only embarking on a career for a short time, but instead Wheaton appeared to be preparing its graduates for a lifetime of professional success.

Alumnae Reports

The Wheaton News during the early 1960s reported on professions that alumnae had undertaken through their Alumnae Reports, thereby showing more evidence of increased interest in careers for Wheaton graduates for current students. In 1960, the Wheaton News reported an announcement by the Placement Office, which noted, “about 80 of the 135 graduates have applied for various employment possibilities.”\(^{136}\) Seniors were seeking employment in a much wider variety of positions than had been the case in previous years. “The greatest interest has been shown towards positions in such organizations as International Business Machines, Central Intelligence Agency, Harvard University, and Lord and Taylor.” In addition the Placement Office reported, “there are opportunities in insurance companies, national organizations such as Girl Scouts of America, or the National Red Cross, library work, and various opportunities in leading department stores such as Jordan Marsh, Hahne’s Inc., Lord and Taylor, or Macy’s.” The list went on to include professions for women who majored in the sciences or mathematics. This varied list showed a shift from limited opportunities for women to multiple job opportunities.

Also the 1960s a distinction emerged between short-term jobs before marriage to careers that women would pursue throughout their lives. Up until this point, alumnae jobs had been announced sporadically every few years, but during the early 1960s, an announcement appeared in the Wheaton News every year, most likely showing increased interest in after-Wheaton for current students who were given ideas on how to proceed after graduation. In 1962, an announcement about the class of 1961 called the question of what a Wheaton College student would do with her education “of paramount importance.” A survey from the Class of 1961 pointed to an increase in graduate studies: 20% of alumnae had entered graduate school. 20% of the class went right into professions of education, while 16% held jobs in “research, library work, social work, and government.” The remaining 20% were in professions in the business world. The article even stated, “The wide-range of interests expressed, however, describe almost limitless possibilities for the liberal arts student or more specifically, the Wheaton girl.” The early 1960s brought a change in the way that opportunities were presented to the Wheaton women at the end of their college experience. In 1963, the report on the Class of 1962 indicated that there was a 5% increase in graduate school attendance, from 20-25% of graduates entering a wide variety of programs. Wheaton women also found employment in advertising, secretary work, sales, research analysis, television production, banking, insurance, architecture, and of course, education. A few months later in May of 1963, the Placement Office again remarked on the progress of the Class of 1963 in reaching out towards the world in terms of graduate study and careers. The

director of the Placement Office “estimated that only 5% of the Class of 1963 would become housewives immediately.” In this case, it seems that there was a change from praising early marriage to encouraging seniors to spend time working outside of the home in careers, at least according to the administration.

The kinds of jobs referenced changed, too. At this point that there was less mention of jobs typically held by women, and the Wheaton News to advertised the jobs for women working in the mathematical and scientific fields. The article stated, “Wheaton women will challenge the man’s world as research assistants in industrial laboratories.” By stating that a “man’s world” existed, the News was also bringing up the possibility of changing the professions that were thought to be acceptable for women, and instead promoting all types of careers for both genders. Historian Elaine Tyler May wrote about the daughters of women who had faced cultural constraints and had chosen security over progress during their formative years in the 1950s in her book Homeward Bound. She noted, “Many of their daughters abandoned security and material comfort to follow a more autonomous path that brought them fact to face with economic hardship and pervasive discrimination. Yet, like their mothers, many would say that the struggles were worth it.” Although there was not complete equality for women during the early 1960s, mothers from the 1950s who had been constrained by domestic containment encouraged young college-aged women to seek more out of life than security.

A final example of the dichotomy between past and present played out in the 1960s fell on the more positive side of the relationship between women and increased vocational opportunities. The April 23rd, 1964, edition of the Wheaton News included an

140 May, Homeward Bound, 213.
article about a speech by President Johnson on women’s role in American history. When President Johnson inherited the presidency from Kennedy after his assassination, he kept many of Kennedy’s programs. He tried to combine social reform at home with intervention in foreign lands through the Vietnam War through his Great Society program. His policies continued to allow for the social and cultural changes that had already begun to take form, especially in relation to women. In his speech he stated, “My whole aim in promoting women and picking out more women to serve in this administration is to underline our profound belief that we can waste no talent, we can frustrate no creative and challenging society.” Johnson spoke of the “great gains” that the U.S. had made since women had received the vote, and he said that he did not want to waste their potential to make America a better place. The article spoke to two ideas on the changing view of women’s opportunities. First, the speech itself showed that women were being put in the forefront of American society, and that their intellectual and professional prowess was being rewarded, instead of their ability to make a comfortable home. The choice of the editors to incorporate Johnson’s speech in the Wheaton News shows there was a certain new level of pride in what the President said, as well as a desire to convince the Wheaton community to share their professional and intellectual prowess with our country because it would be rewarded.

Women and Higher Education:

According to historian Linda Eisenmann, although women continued to attend college throughout the postwar period, the proportion of their enrollment in relation to men’s fell during the 1950s. From the 1950s until the 1960s, the proportion of women in

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141 “LBJ Lauds Ladies, Cites Creative Roles”, Wheaton News, 23 April 1964, Gebbie Archives.
institutions of higher education had grown from 31% in 1950 to 37% in 1960. This was only the beginning of a decade of increasing rates of enrollment for women throughout the 1960s, so that by 1980 women surpassed men in this respect. The increased emphasis on women’s role in the greater American society added to this growth, whereas the gap between the opportunities that women were given for success and the ways that they used them became much smaller than it had been during the 1950s. It seems that particularly at Wheaton, there were more frequent discussions that discounted women’s passive role as a homemaker and instead emphasized women’s role in the career or graduate academic world. In two situations, women’s role in higher education was called into question, promoted, and criticized.

Higher education for women was once again tested in America during the early part of the 1960s through the Minnesota Plan. The Minnesota Plan for Continuing Education of Women during the early 1960s was meant to benefit women who had abandoned their educations early, providing a new look at women’s place in higher education during this time. The plan itself served many different purposes and many different women with an interest in higher education. Effectively, it focused on three distinct groups. The first was women who were in college at the time, and the aim was to keep them within higher education institutions by providing counseling and therapy sessions. The Minnesota Plan also included help for young mothers, who benefited from special programs and counseling services offered at flexible hours. The Plan also targeted women who had left their education many years before but would be exposed to special

142 Eisenmann, Higher Education for Women in Postwar America, 1945-1965, 44.
courses to get them interested in careers.\textsuperscript{143} The thinking behind the Minnesota Plan incorporated the ideas of several different groups. On the one hand, different educational groups such as the American Council on Education and the American Association of University Women wanted both to utilize women in the workforce as vital members, which would recuperate wasted womanpower, and to help improve American society to its fullest extent. On the other hand, the falling age of married women and mothers enabled women to have several decades when they could effectively join the labor force or return to their education.\textsuperscript{144} On October 11\textsuperscript{th}, 1962, an article on the Minnesota Plan was incorporated into the \textit{Wheaton News}. It was entitled “‘Minnesota Plan’ Stimulates Women To Advance Study” and describes the drive at the University of Minnesota to educate women who either did not complete their bachelor’s degree, or to encourage women to work towards their master’s degree while providing services to accommodate wives and mothers.\textsuperscript{145} The fact that the Minnesota Plan was mentioned in the \textit{Wheaton News} meant that furthering education and careers was important for the Wheaton community. The article stated, “Fifty percent of women in the United States marry by the time they are twenty; by twenty-six the average woman has had her last child. This means that taking into account the increased life expectancy, a woman can expect about thirty-five years of productive life after her children are grown. What better way to use these years than to take advantage of the Minnesota Plan?” This statement demonstrated a change in sentiment from the article in 1957 that promote women’s education not for the end result of a career or the personal growth of the woman herself, but rather so that she

\textsuperscript{145} “‘Minnesota Plan’ Stimulates Women to Advance Study”, \textit{Wheaton News}, 11 October 1962, Gebbie Archivess.
could be useful to her husband and child. The Minnesota Plan helped women of all ages to escape their lives as housewives, mothers, and wives and instead stand on their own. It appeared that the dialogue had changed in the short years between the late 1950s and the early 1960s in order to promote and encourage women to seek advanced study for their personal benefits.

The work of Betty Friedan in American society affected women’s role in higher education, as she was one of the pioneers of the early feminist movement when she dared to suggest that white housewives were unhappy in their comfortable positions contained within the home. Betty Friedan used the idea of the “feminine mystique” to enlighten women on the forces at work against them and bring them together. Although Friedan was criticized for not including the plight of African American or working class women, she did speak to the group who would be most likely to have attended Wheaton College, white middle-class women. In summarizing Friedan’s argument and its effect on future generations historian Stephanie Coontz says, “Women, like men, have the need and desire to find larger meaning in their lives. The pain that women feel when this need goes unmet should be taken no less seriously just because many of them had satisfied the lower-order needs for safety, security, and physical comfort.” When this was written, this idea was revolutionary because those women who had the privilege to become housewives should not complain about receiving a comfortable existence. Oftentimes, college-aged women, like Wheaton students in the early 1960s, would have had mothers who had been housewives throughout the 1950s but had recently read The Feminine

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Understanding the forces at work that were beyond their control, they might urge their daughters to choose different life paths that would enable them a greater sense of choice in the planning for their future. In this case, young women who would have been graduating around the time that the book was published and in the years afterwards may have already read *The Feminine Mystique* and had taken the ideas expressed in it to apply to their own lives and educations, leading to fewer earlier marriages and a growth in careers and advanced degrees. In this way, Friedan and her readers exposed the connection between domestic containment and Cold War politics as they gradually began to understand the dichotomy between fear and security that the government was playing off when making Americans aware of the ideal woman. Presumably, women at Wheaton during the beginning of the 1960s would have already have figured out this connection and would have been more encouraged to make changes in traditions than their counterparts in the 1940s and 1950s. The inclusion of an article on Betty Friedan in the *Wheaton News* makes this seem possible.

On November 21st, 1963, the *Wheaton News* included a review of Betty Friedan’s influential book *The Feminine Mystique*, which bashed ideas that women lived their lives for the sole purpose of being available to their children and husbands. Friedan’s idea resembled those that had been explained in the 1957 article from Wesleyan University. The Wesleyan article offered a critical analysis of women’s lives in institutions of higher education, and its inclusion in the *News* had suggested that it resonated with the experiences of Wheaton students. The simple inclusion of a review of *The Feminine Mystique* in the *Wheaton News* indicated that the Wheaton community was becoming

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much more attuned to the idea of a positive change in which women would be presented as intellectual. The author of the review quoted Betty Friedan’s clear statement of this divide when she said of young women: “They go through the motions, but they defend themselves against the impersonal passions of mind and spirit and college might instill in them—the dangerous non-sexual passions of the intellect.” The article related scenario of a government class in which fifteen young women sat “knitting with the stony-faced concentration.” When the teacher stated that Western civilization was coming to an end, none of the students made any motion except to write this fact down in their notebooks.¹⁴⁹ In a certain sense, the inclusion of the review of *The Feminine Mystique* represented a criticism of women’s higher education in America and possibly of the way that higher education had been performed at Wheaton. All one would have to remember was a few short years earlier when almost every aspect of academic life involved marriage or dating. Wheaton women were aware of the stereotypes that had befallen them throughout the 1950s, and they were taking them into consideration during the 1960s. The inclusion of this review implied that Wheaton was safeguarding itself from this stereotype and instead wanting to make the community aware of the problem so their graduates could go out in the world more self-assured in their intellectual ability.

**Intellectual Community:**

Politically and developmentally, the early 1960s were a turning point in America. Kennedy’s New Frontier emphasized new developments in science and technology that counterparts in the 1950s had begun during the previous decade. Additionally, Kennedy symbolized change and the rise of a younger generation that was politically involved.

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Both at home and abroad he faced political challenges that tested his will and tested America’s strength. The burgeoning Civil Rights Movement in America and the mounting tensions in Vietnam gave President Kennedy a name for creating policies that addressed previous points of contention.\textsuperscript{150} Kennedy emphasized individuality for all Americans and helped men and women envision a better society through individual effort.\textsuperscript{151} The switch from emphasizing security to deal with the stressful outside world during the 1950s to emphasizing politics and action during the 1960s was surprising but necessary. In this way, the pull of the home and traditional gender roles loosened when middle-class Americans discovered the façade that was domestic containment. These people realized that staying quiet and passive during the 1950s did not allow them more security as Americans but may have only exacerbated the fear and conflict that surrounded them. College campuses have long been notorious for inciting change, and this was true even at Wheaton. Young women again began to show an interest in politics and their education differently from the way they had in the 1950s.

Politics:

Wheaton students moved away from security by getting political. In this particular case, those who already had an active role in politics also urged Wheaton students to take a more active role through their engagement with the League of Women Voters. This example came from a long period of little political activity throughout the 1950s. On October 10\textsuperscript{th}, 1963, when the \textit{Wheaton New} announced a visit by Lucy Wilson Benson, the President of the League of Women Voters of Massachusetts, who was “concerned

\textsuperscript{150} LaFeber, \textit{American Century}, 131-132.
\textsuperscript{151} May, \textit{Homeward Bound}, 208.
primarily with the role of women in government activities.”\textsuperscript{152} The purpose of her presence on college campuses throughout Massachusetts was to urge young women to get involved in politics in order to have a positive influence on policies that affected all women and people in general. It made sense that this interest in politics after college did not emerge on the Wheaton campus until the 1960s, based on the other evidence that showed a steady lack of intellectual community during the 1950s. During the 1950s, volunteer associations such as the League of Women Voters allowed women to balance their familial duties without sacrificing their interests. Although regarded as too passive by Betty Friedan, the League of Women Voters was an important organization that promoted women’s leadership and activism. Some women even sought out electoral politics and activist causes because of their participation in the League.\textsuperscript{153} Although the organization might have operated as an alternative to a fulltime career for women, it was important that young women were urged while in college to join a group in which they could speak their minds and remain politically active.

As young women began to engage with politics in the 1960s, the political world began to engage with them in return. The creation of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women in 1961 by President Kennedy indicated that women began to matter politically in the already politically charged climate of America. As historian Linda Eisenmann noted, “Kennedy had created the two-year, twenty-six-member panel to ‘review progress and make recommendations’ regarding American women’s employment, their civil and political rights, and the services – including education—

\textsuperscript{152} “League Guest Urges Female Political Roles”, \textit{Wheaton News}, 10 October 1963, Gebbie Archives.
necessary for women’s full participation as modern citizens.”  

Although some groups had already begun their work to boost women in American society during the period of domestic containment, the President’s Commission on the Status of Women (PCSW) was operating in a period of national civil rights changes that often pulled in issues of gender to the legislation that had already been put in place for African Americans. This happened in the battles over both the Equal Pay Act and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act. The PCSW created an educational committee, indicating a notion that education might be one way to boost women’s status within American society. Women could also discuss serious issues with authority when they had the leverage of advanced education behind them. At the end of the two-year commission, The resulting report recommended that women ought to have more choices when it came to education, but that this should not compromise their responsibilities within the home and with their families. The report produced emphasized women’s choices in their futures, and it was vague about how women should address their familial responsibilities. Within this atmosphere of increased choice in education, young women at Wheaton would have considered their future lives while still in college. The sentiments of the President’s Commission on the Status of Women was reflected by the class of 1964 at Wheaton College, who sought out advanced degrees more and worked a wider variety of careers more often than the previous classes analyzed. At the same time, the President’s Commission on the Status of Women existed within its place in time. The early 1960s still held many elements of the

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156 May, Homeward Bound, 209.  
traditional gender roles, which was reflected by the concentration of women’s choices within the parameters of the home within the conclusions of the commission.

Owning Education:

In comparison to earlier postwar years, the 1960s saw a rise in intellectual curiosity among Wheaton women more similar to that reflected in the 1940s than to the lesser interest shown in the 1950s. The new generation of Wheaton women graduating in the 1960s had a more active role on campus in making changes. One indicator of this newfound intellectual curiosity lay in a student petition for changes that would have a positive benefit on the rest of the students’ academic careers or future careers. In the 1940s, President Meneely had used student polls and surveys as he had reorganized the curriculum and increased the size of the Wheaton campus. Almost twenty years later, students were again involved in the creation of a new curriculum, this time through a new emphasis on the liberal arts over concentration within the major. On November 21st, 1963, the Wheaton News ran a headline that declared: “Juniors, Seniors Value Liberal Arts Would Like Less Emphasis On Major.” During this time, educational experts highlighted the value of a liberal arts education, which would prepare graduates for any profession that they wanted, because they would be graduating with a variety of skills based on the broad curriculum. Wheaton students’ preference for liberal arts indicated that upperclassmen especially would be interested in careers, rather than the “well-adjusted social life” of the late 1950s.

The benefits of a liberal arts education were discussed more broadly in America throughout the late 1950s and early 1960s in relation to women’s education. The report

from the Commission on the Education of Women (CEW) *How Fare American Women?*
emerged during the later part of the 1950s, and it contended that women’s primary role
within the home and family was hurting their opportunities for success academically and
professionally.\(^{159}\) Unfortunately, the report did not offer many solutions to how to change
women’s societal expectations until the CEW’s conference on women’s education, which
was held in Rye, New York later in the 1950s. During the conference, participants
discussed solutions based on the curriculum on college campuses like Wheaton’s.
According to historian Linda Eisenmann, “Some speakers believed that only the liberal
arts, with their strong general focus, could prepare large numbers of women for the
widest set of possibilities.”\(^{160}\) Wheaton students’ efforts to promote the introduction of a
more rigorous liberal arts schedule within the curriculum can be best understood in this
context. Just a few years after the CEW conference in Rye, the Wheaton Bulletin from
the year 1963/1964 included a new section to discuss the inclusion of the liberal arts as a
benefit to the student. “Wheaton offers a four-year liberal arts program leading to a
Bachelor of Arts degree. The curriculum provides a broad foundation of general
knowledge and a two-year period of concentration in major fields.”\(^{161}\) This curricular
change demonstrated both that Wheaton students could have an active voice on campus,
and that they used their active voice to demand a change in curriculum that would benefit
both their education at Wheaton as well as their future careers. Wheaton students would
probably have agreed with Rye conference participants in their assertions that the liberal
arts provided them with an expansion on their educations while in college in order to

achieve a greater number of possibilities for employment later in their lives. Some of the innovations that had taken place in women’s education during the 1950s had a lasting effect on institutions of higher education during the following decade when things were becoming drastically different for women.

**Marriage:**

As in many aspects of life in the 1960s for college-aged women, some cultural messages pointed towards an early marriage and other messages pointed away from it. At Wheaton, mixed messages confronted Wheaton’s graduates when the family mentality of the 1950s failed to disappear completely by the early 1960s. At the same time, Wheaton pushed its graduates towards careers and advanced degrees, leading them to marry as early as Wheaton alumnae had in the 1950s less often. In the wider scope of America, changing relationships between men and women and between the younger and older generations were becoming more and more common. If the mothers of college-aged women were most directly affected by the feminine mystique, it was also true that these young women themselves saw the lives of their parents, especially their mothers, and their marriages and decided it was the exact opposite of what they wanted in their own lives. As historian Stephanie Coontz has noted, “Historian Ruth Rosen and sociologist Wini Breines have pointed out that many women who grew up in the 1950s and 1960s developed a deep suspicion of marriage and motherhood not by reading Friedan but by observing life in a ‘normal’ family.” Often young women’s suspicion of the family played out in anger at or pity for their mothers who fully embodied the ideal woman of the earlier decade, causing them to choose a different path for their own lives. The 1960s

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were definitely an era of questioning authority and the actions of past generations, and
this was even the case for future choices for college women. In addition, the introduction
of oral contraceptives in 1960 changed the way that young people viewed relationships
and the purpose of marriage. Although it was still necessary, marriage became less
important and the foundation on which it was based began to crumble very slowly. Based on these facts, one would expect marriage to happen with less frequency on
Wheaton’s campus. In some ways it did; the Wheaton News did not include as many
wedding and engagement announcements as it had previously. But at the same time, the
college administration prepared for the absence of young women who would leave
college in order to marry with a strengthened withdrawal policy in the Bulletin. These
two conflicting ideas reflect the changes that had only begun to take shape during the
1960s, but could not yet be fully credited with the end of domestic containment.
Rings and Bells:

The “Rings and Bells” section of the Wheaton News was a good measure of
understanding how many Wheaton women choose early marriages over careers and
further education and during that the 1960s, there was a fairly significant drop in the
number of announcements. Consistently throughout the 1950s, the Wheaton News had
announced as many as 46 engagements per year, although most hovered around the late
thirties and early forties. As the 1960s began, the number dropped from 46
announcements in 1959 to 39 announcements in 1960. The next few years in the 1960s
the number of announcements drifted as low as 22. More importantly, following the
explosion of announcements during the late 1950s, the average dropped again to about 31

163 May, Homeward Bound, 208.
per year from 1960 until 1963. Another indicator of less focus on early marriage was the fact that the “Rings and Bells” section was completely cancelled after 1963. Although the specific reason for the absence of “Rings and Bells” in later editions of the *Wheaton News* is unknown, its disappearance might have had something to do with the fact that there were not enough marriages and engagements to report on. The decline could have also been caused by a choice by the editors of the *Wheaton News* to discourage praise for students who would leave college without graduating for the purpose of marriage. Both of these possibilities were plausible given the changing climate of Wheaton during the early 1960s.164

Withdrawal Policy:

Although the minimization or absence of marriage and engagement announcements could point to the fact that Wheaton women were embarking on other life paths that they had not considered as frequently during the 1950s, it is difficult to say this completely based on the increased exposure of the Withdrawal Policy included in the *Wheaton College Bulletin*. Women who got engaged or married before graduation often would not finish their education, and their withdrawals from Wheaton changed the graduation rates for seniors. As Wheaton expanded both in physical size and student body, the college raised tuitions because the college depended on the tuition of all accepted students in order to function properly. With young women frequently resigning from their educations, Wheaton could not afford to expand. The Wheaton administration created a new Withdrawal Policy that would enable young women to withdraw from college, but would cap the amount of money that the school would refund to the student

depending on how many months the young bride had already spent on campus. The new withdrawal policy was instituted during the 1960/1961 school year.

Before 1960/1961, the withdrawal policy could be found in the Bulletin among other college policies, and it was only a few sentences long. But the bulletin of this year featured a lengthy section on the operation of the college when a student chose not to attend Wheaton anymore. Standing alone from the other college policies in the Bulletin, the procedure for withdrawal stated: “the right, therefore is reserved to request at any time the withdrawal of a student who fails to conform to the established standards of the college, or who fails to notify the college of a significant change in marital status or general health.” The inclusion of marital status indicated that the college administration was fully aware of the increasing rate of women leaving college for early marriages. Two years later, during the 1962/1963 school year the college had come up with a detailed plan for returning tuition to the family of the student who would be withdrawing based on the month in which she reached her decision. Early in each semester a greater percentage of the tuition was refunded, while further along in each semester a smaller percentage could be returned. As an explanation for the more involved and specified withdrawal policy, the bulletin stated, “parents and students are asked to reach final decision before a series of dates to prevent vacancies which cannot be filled.” Why was a stricter withdrawal policy an effective addition to the college bulletin during this time period? the two factors combined in this instance. Firstly, based on the increase in marriages of Wheaton women during the late 1950s as indicated by the growing Rings and Bells section in the Wheaton News, the administration seemed to have wanted to prepare for all the women who were choosing marriage and leaving their educations by creating a clear
system to deal with the inevitable. The increase in marriages occurred in conjunction with
the general drive at Wheaton as well as at most college campuses to increase
professionalism. At Wheaton during this time, the student body was again expanded to fit
expansions of other institutions of higher education, which became more like colleges
and universities that we know today. To better run these more professional institutions, it
became necessary for Wheaton to embrace the trends such as early marriage that
minimized the student body and to prevent such devastating blows to their progress by
including stricter policies to keep women in school.

As in the two previous decades, the lives of actual Wheaton women played out in
particular ways during the 1960s. The year 1959 seemed to be the high point of domestic
containment practices in America, with the lowest graduation rates for the entire twenty
years covered in this study. At this time, only 57% of students who entered the college as
freshmen graduated as seniors. Just five short years later, the completion rate increased to
70% in 1964. If women were staying in school until graduation, it was less likely that
they were also married and more likely that they would try out some sort of career or
advanced degree after graduation. In 1964, 21 majors were represented by the graduating
seniors out of a possible 21 majors that were included in the Wheaton College Bulletin
from that school year. Wheaton students from the class of 1964 seemed to combine
different majors in interesting fashions in terms of specializations, such as “History of
Art” and “European History”. In all respects, it appeared as though Wheaton students
during the early 1960s were taking full advantage of the courses of study offered at
Wheaton. Majors in the sciences also indicated the support of women’s traditional or
untraditional roles. In 1964, 11% of the graduating class chose majors that were in the
scientific scope, up from 7% from the class of 1959. This increase indicated a greater emphasis on science and intellectual thought in a way that differed from the more traditionally feminine views of women of previous years.

Wheaton women’s lives following graduation during the 1960s conformed to the effects of domestic containment as had those of their counterparts in the 1950s, but the lives of alumnae also showed serious growth into more public roles in society more similar to those of their counterparts in the 1940s. It seemed that the prime marriage years were during the three years following graduation, with 81% of women in the survey marrying between 0 and 3 years after graduation compared with the 61% of respondents who married during that same time period in the class of 1959. This growth in early marriage reflected equal or increased pressures on women to marry early during the earliest years of the 1960s. Although more women married during these immediate post-collegiate years, women were less likely to marry during the four years they were in college. Only 3% of the class of 1964 married during their college years, compared to the 28% from the class that had graduated just five years earlier. This shift was also reflected in the absence of “Rings and Bells” in the Wheaton News and in the more general tendency to value women’s higher education, cracking the foundation of domestic containment that had pushed women into even earlier marriages during the 1950s, especially at Wheaton. Even though a grand majority of women married in the years immediately following graduation, many more were willing to wait. The range of years definitely increased, with a significant percentage of the class of 1964 marrying for the first time between nine and fifteen years after graduation. Perhaps these women used the gap between education and marriage to pursue careers or advanced degrees. It is true that
a minimal number of women in the class of 1964 responded to the class notes, and this was reflected by the fact that the survey data showed that 35% of the class of 1964 held some sort of employment during their lives. More interestingly, a change in the most popular professions became increasingly common. Throughout the 1940s and 1950s, the most popular professions for Wheaton women were supportive roles to men, who were the bosses. Although the two most popular professions remained teaching and secretarial work, the increase in the profession of business as the third most popular profession demonstrated the fact that women were participating in a more active manner in society. Additionally, women were more likely to work continuously throughout their lives instead of in just a section of their lives before marriage or after their children had grown. This pattern of work had never been seen before in any of the earlier graduated classes during the early Cold War period. Change from the 1950s was also reflected in the fact that more women were seeking advanced degrees, both Masters Degrees and PhDs. In the class of 1964, 20% of respondents continued their education after graduation, compared to only 10% of the class of 1959. Women from the class of 1964 appeared to feel that they had more options than had their counterparts in the 1950s, based on the increase in the number of women marrying later in their lives, seeking advanced degrees, and occupying careers that had previously been available only to their husbands.

The foundations of domestic containment had started to crumble both at Wheaton College and for women in America in general. In a lot of ways, the early 1960s was a period that mixed the 1950s with what we have come to know as the late 1960s. Effectively, traditional gender roles continued to exist, but they were infiltrated by ideas of social change. Young women’s lives reflected this dichotomy, especially at Wheaton
during the early 1960s, where women continued to marry with frequency because of societal pressures. But Wheaton women also had a slightly easier time combining these marriages with other life paths including careers and further education. The beginnings of these changes did not exist in a vacuum, but rather were the result of a generally more active character of politics in America and more specifically for women. Groups like the President’s Commission on the Status of Women and the League of Women Voters embodied the fact that women were taking on a more public role while at the same time continuing to appreciate their more private one. Women at Wheaton College during the early 1960s came of age and made their life choices within this political and cultural climate, and it was reflected in the way that many of their futures played out up to the present.
Conclusion

There is a lot to be learned from Wheaton women who attended college between the early 1940s and the mid-1960s. Although it is easy to judge the way that their lives turned out, it is more important to try to understand their reasons for these decisions. One way to understand their lives and their choices is by studying the political and cultural pressures that they would have been exposed to while in college. The college years are formative. It is a time when new ideas and intellectual curiosities become an important aspect of everyday life and exposure into different types of people, experiences, and aspirations are a commonplace. It can be a time when a young woman decides her true passion and begins the path to the realization of these passions. But it is important to put each young woman’s transformative years, the different experiences, intellectual curiosities, and passions, within the context of the time period in which she would have come of age in this way.

At the same time, it is not right to mark every woman’s experience as the same within the same historical context. My evidence at Wheaton has shown that the way that Wheaton students interpreted the cultural and political surroundings was not uniform. For example, at times they were exposed to many different types of factors that would have pushed them into careers and advanced degrees, but the grand majority chose an early marriage. At other times, even among the pressure from their peers to find husbands while in college, they continued pursuing alternate ways to live their lives. One woman who would have graduated in 1959 had she not married and left college reflected in 2009 that a philosophy professor mentioned to her, “I hope if you haven’t learned anything else
you will want more than a white picket fence. A separate dialogue that praised women’s role in careers and graduate schools continued to run through this time period, although it was sometimes more difficult to undercover. It is helpful to make conclusions about the way that each separate time period operated and its affect on young women at Wheaton, but it must be taken with the understanding that every woman was not the same. It is true that Wheaton College and even the broader sphere of the United States during these three decades was a place caught within the historical and political context that existed. These factors affected the lives of their citizens in multiple ways that would make this time period stand out as being special and occasionally misunderstood outside of the historical setting.

The period of 1940s until the 1960s was a time of tension. After the lengthy time period of World War II, which followed the Great Depression, it is probable that young American women and their families were tired of sadness, worry, and fear. Immediately moving into the Cold War, a quiet, but present, conflict that seeped into every aspect of American life and consciousness, was an extension of that fear. It was in this political context that the cultural aspects of this time period were magnified. Americans embraced their political surroundings and tried to make use of them, especially when it involved the role of American women. Women who stepped up into the public sphere were rewarded with affirmation that they were preserving the lives of American men and often emphasized their femininity. When the men returned, it was continued fear of outside influences that pushed women back into the private sphere and kept them there until the

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165 Class Letter, Class of 1959, General Files, Gebbie Archives.
middle of the 1960s. This fear ran through the 1940s until the 1960s and continuously morphed women’s role was characteristic and affected political and cultural factors.

It is easy to think about women’s role in the past and to study the factors that affected our grandmothers and great-grandmothers. It becomes more difficult to try to understand the time period in which we are living from a similar perspective. Does the same type of fear exist and does it affect women’s role in a similar manner? It is important to try to understand what cultural and political factors exist for us currently that would affect the way we perceive gender roles. Although it appears that women are under different pressures in our current time, we have come far from our housewives of the 1950s. Anita Eger, Wheaton College graduating class of 1954, shared these sentiments of the changes in the way that women are perceived in America today in the Class Letter of 1979. “Watching our daughters reach the age of decision-making and then jumping off into the college world brings back so many memories. Even more so when they are about to embark on a career in what used to be a man’s world, I look at what is expected of young women now and am very thankful for the new directions schools like Wheaton have taken. I hope, however, that our young women will be conscious of the fact that they are becoming useful members of the human race, first of all, and women secondly! I think a sense of perspective is very important.”

As we move forward in time, let us keep in perspective the way that history affected women before us and that even in times of conflict and in times of peace as well as in times of great political and cultural change, their experiences will continue to affect ours.

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166 Class Letter, Class of 1954, General Files, Gebbie Archives.
Appendix A

Wheaton College Alumnae Survey

Questions

The information for the Wheaton College Alumnae Survey (WCAS) for the years 1944, 1949, 1954, 1959, and 1964 was compiled using class reunion newsletters found in the general files of the Marion B. Gebbie ’01 Archives and Special Collections at Wheaton College. During reunion years, officers of each class would give both graduated and non-graduated members the opportunity to send back information about themselves and their activities since either graduation or the previous reunion. Information from these women was compiled and then analyzed in terms of majors while in college, marriage, careers, advanced degrees, and children. The following questions were used to analyze Wheaton women’s experiences while at college and later.

Some of the questions were not used, but all are included here for a complete description of the research.

These fields were used to collect and organize the information.

1. Woman’s Name
2. Graduation Year
3. Graduation: Yes or No
4. Major
5. Married: Yes or No
6. Number of years after graduation she married
7. Number of children
8. Number of years after graduation she had her first child
9. Work: Yes or No
10. Which part of her lifetime: all throughout her life, after graduation until marriage, after graduation until she had her first child, or after her children had grown
11. What her job/jobs were
12. Advanced degree: graduate school, PhD program, secretarial school, additional classes
13. “Extraprofessions”: volunteering, Junior League, League of Women Voters, bridge club, garden club, Parent Teacher Association, American Association of University Women, involvement in church, art, or political groups
Appendix B

Tables and Charts

Figure 4. Graduation Rates for Wheaton College Women, 1944-1964, (Wheaton College Bulletin from 1941-1961 and Wheaton Yearbook 1949-1964, Marion B. Gebbie ‘01 Archives and Special Collections, Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts.)

Figure 5. “Rings and Bells” Announcements 1945-1964 (Wheaton News, 1945-1963, Marion B. Gebbie ‘01 Archives and Special Collections, Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts.)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Graduated</th>
<th>Percentage of Women in Advanced Degrees</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>10%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>20%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 6. Wheaton Women in Advanced Degrees (Source: Class of 1944, 1949, 1954, 1959 and 1964 General Files, Marion B. Gebbie ’01 Archives and Special Collections, Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Class Graduated</th>
<th>Percent Working</th>
<th>Time period working most often</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>31%</td>
<td>After their children were grown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>28%</td>
<td>Until marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>Until marriage/after children were grown</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>46%</td>
<td>Until marriage</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>35%</td>
<td>Throughout their lives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 7. Wheaton Women Working (Source: Class of 1944, 1949, 1954, 1959, and 1964 General Files, Marion B. Gebbie ’01 Archives and Special Collections, Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts)
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Percent Married</th>
<th>Percent Unmarried</th>
<th>Percent Unknown</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1944</td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1949</td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1954</td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>17%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1959</td>
<td>87%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1964</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>1%</td>
<td>73%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 8. Marriage Rates for Wheaton Women (Source: Class of 1944, 1949, 1954, 1959, and 1964 General Files, Marion B. Gebbie Archives and Special Collections, Wheaton College, Norton, Massachusetts)
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